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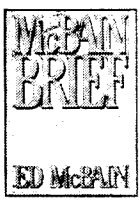

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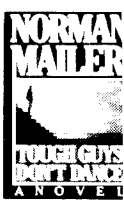

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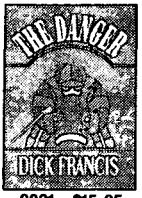

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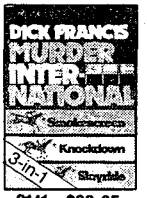

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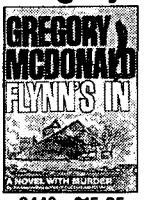

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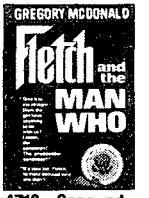

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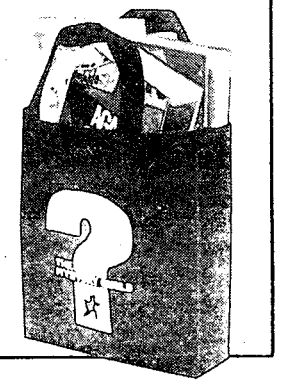

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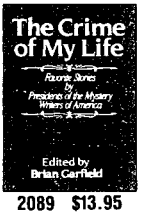

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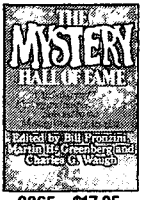

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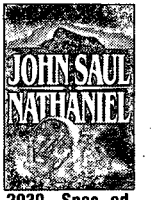

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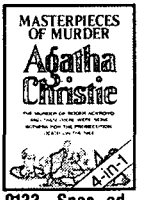

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Gonzolas tried to laugh, but his mouth was filling with blood. "You'll never get Poder," he managed to gasp. "Nobody will."

"Come on, Gonzolas, he left you to die. You owe him nothing," Ben said.

But it was too late. The Mexican's head lolled to one side and his eyes closed. For an instant it seemed he was dead. Then, as Ben started to straighten up, Gonzolas uttered his last words. "The bells," he said. "Listen for the bells and you will find Poder. Or Poder will find you . . ."

THE TRAIL OF THE BELLS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Ben Snow had been on the trail for two days before he found the dying man by the water hole. He drew his horse Oats up slowly, right hand resting on the butt of his pistol, aware that he might be riding into a trap. But then he saw the bloody bandage across the man's chest and recognized him as Tommy Gonzolas, the half-Mexican gunman who'd ridden with Poder since the beginning. His horse grazed on the sparse grass nearby.

Ben still approached slowly, even after he knew Gonzolas was dying. Although the desert terrain allowed little cover for a rifleman, he knew that Poder wouldn't be above the ruthlessness of baiting a trap with a dying man. "Are you armed?" he asked Gonzolas. "Throw me your gun."

The man barely lifted his head, and the hands that clutched at his chest made no movement toward the pistol that lay on the sand

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a foot away. Ben stepped quickly forward and kicked the weapon out of reach. Then he stooped to examine the wound.

"I'm dying," Gonzolas said quite clearly. He'd been wounded during the bank robbery back in Tosco, and the only reason Ben Snow had taken on the job of tracking Poder through the desert was the belief that the serious wound might slow down the fugitives. But Poder had left the man to die beside a water hole with his gun and ridden on without him.

"Tell me about Poder," Ben asked the man. "Where's he headed? What does he look like without his mask?"

Gonzolas tried to laugh, but his mouth was filling with blood. "You'll never get Poder," he managed to gasp. "Nobody will."

"Come on, Gonzolas, he left you to die. You owe him nothing."

But it was too late. The Mexican's head lolled to one side and his eyes closed. For an instant it seemed he was dead. Then, as Ben started to straighten up, Gonzolas uttered his last words. "The bells," he said. "Listen for the bells and you will find Poder. Or Poder will find you."

Whether the words were meant to help or to lead Ben to his death, Ben didn't know. But the bells were the only lead he had, and after pausing long enough to bury Tommy Gonzolas at the water hole and unsaddle and set free his horse, he rode on in search of them.

It was the following day that he came upon the girl with the dead horse. She was dressed in denim pants and a man's shirt, but even from a distance there was no doubt about her sex. She held her head high and proud, with long dark hair hanging halfway down her back, and the rifle in her hands was warning enough that she was not to be tampered with. Still, with no towns or trails in sight, Ben felt an obligation to offer assistance. As he drew nearer, he was glad he had. The dead horse on the ground at her feet fitted closely the description of the pinto that Poder had ridden out of Tosco.

She lowered her rifle as he approached on horseback. "I thought at first it was him coming back," she said.

"Who? What happened here?"

"Masked man stole my horse."

Ben dismounted and went over to inspect the dead horse. It had been killed by a shot through the head at close range. "What did he look like?"

"I told you he was wearing a mask—a cloth bag that covered his

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head, with holes for his eyes. He was short, about my height, and he knew how to handle a gun."

"What are you doing out here alone?"

She started to raise the rifle again. "Who wants to know?"

Ben smiled, stepped up to the weapon, and pushed the barrel gently aside. "The man who stole your horse is known as Poder, and Poder never would have left you with a loaded rifle to shoot him in the back as he rode away. He took the bullets, didn't he?"

"You seem to know everything, Mr.—"

"Snow. Ben Snow."

She seemed to relax a little, as if knowing his name made him more acceptable. "I'm Amy Forrest. My brother and I have a small ranch in the valley about forty miles from here. I was looking for strays—"

"In the desert?"

"Sometimes they come this far, especially the young ones that don't know any better. There are some water holes nearby."

"I saw one yesterday."

"Anyway, I heard a shot and rode over this way. When the man saw me coming, he pulled that hood over his head and drew a gun on me. Said his horse twisted a leg and he had to shoot it, and he was taking mine. He emptied the bullets out of my rifle, just as you guessed, and left me here. I wish I'd seen his face."

"If you had, you'd have been a dead woman. That masked man who calls himself Poder has never been seen by anyone. He's robbed banks and stagecoaches all over the New Mexico territory. Generally he doesn't even speak. A sidekick named Tommy Gonzolas did the talking for him. But Gonzolas is dead now."

"How come you know so much about him?"

"He killed a banker in Tosco a few days ago. I happened to be in town and they hired me to go after him—sort of a one-man posse."

"What makes you so good?"

He smiled at her. "They got some crazy notion I'm Billy the Kid."

"He's dead."

"Don't tell them. They're paying me well to bring back Poder, dead or alive."

"Does he have a first name?"

"He doesn't have any name, far as I know. *Poder* means 'power' in Spanish. It's just an alias he started using. Nobody knows a thing about him. Nobody but Gonzolas ever saw his face, and now he's dead."

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"I guess I'm lucky to be alive. Can you get me back to my ranch? It's due north of here."

He stared out at the stark landscape, searching for a clue as to the direction Poder might have taken. "I don't know. I was figuring more on heading west. If you plot the locations of Poder's robberies on a map, they seem to be centered west of here. But my horse could carry us both as far as the next settlement and I could drop you there."

"Well, that's something."

He climbed into the saddle and helped her up behind him, surprised at her quick agility.

They'd barely started their trek when he thought he heard something far in the distance. Something that sounded like bells. "What's that?" he asked her.

She listened, cocking her head to the left. "You mean the bells? That's the mission at San Bernardino. It's only a few miles from here. Is that where you'll take me?"

"I think so," Ben decided. "Yes."

The mission came into view at the top of the next rise, and Ben judged it to be about five or six miles from the spot where Poder had stolen Amy Forrest's horse. He rode down the last dune slowly until he reached firmer ground, then urged his horse forward through the scattering of cactus and sagebrush. The mission itself sat in a small oasis and consisted of a white adobe church with a long, low building at the back. Amy explained that this was a monastery of the religious order that staffed the mission and raised what crops they could. "There are only a few priests. The rest are lay brothers who work in the fields. And there are Indians and Mexicans who have a sort of trading post outside the mission."

"You sound as if you know the place well," Ben said.

"I usually stop whenever I ride this way. Women aren't allowed into the monastery, of course, but I like the peacefulness of the church. It always seems cool there, even on a hot day."

He watched several dozen people emerging from the church. "What's going on?"

"It's Sunday morning. They've been to Mass."

"I forgot. Out here the days get to be the same."

"They have just the one Mass at ten o'clock, and that's the only time the bells ring all week. It's a wonder we heard them at all."

"Perhaps we were being called here," Ben murmured . . .

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They dismounted near a paddock where the horses were kept and Amy ran to the railing. "That's King!" she pointed. "That's my horse!"

"The big brown one?"

"I'm certain of it!"

Ben spoke to an Indian standing nearby who seemed to be in charge of the paddock area.

"You there—what's your name?"

"Standing Elk. I am a Pueblo."

"All right, Standing Elk. Did you see who brought that big brown stallion in?"

"No. I do not know him." The Indian wore a suit of fringed buckskin, with a headband but no feathers. He was shorter than Ben and seemed younger.

"You saw no one ride in here about—how long ago, Amy?"

"An hour or so. He stole my horse an hour before you came along. Of course, he might have ridden faster than we did."

"I see no one," Standing Elk insisted.

"All right," Ben said. "Come on, Amy. We'll worry about your horse later."

A priest in Sunday vestments was standing outside the mission church, keeping carefully within the shadow cast by the mission's bell tower. He was young and fair-haired and Ben imagined his skin would burn quickly in the heat of the New Mexico desert.

"Good morning," he greeted Ben. "Welcome to the Mission of San Bernardino. And how are you today, Amy?"

"I'm fine now, Father. This is Ben Snow, Father Angeles."

The priest bowed his head in greeting and Ben noticed for the first time the cowl protruding from the back of his vestments. "I'm sorry you're late for Mass, Ben. We have only the one service here, at ten o'clock. There is also a weekday Mass every morning."

"Ben rescued me from the desert, Father. A gunman stole my horse."

"A gunman? Near here?"

"We think he rode this way, Father," Ben told him. "He's a killer and bank robber known as Poder."

"Power," the priest translated automatically. "I have not heard of him." He turned to Amy. "But, my dear child, you must be exhausted after such an experience—come inside and let Mrs. Rodriguez tend to you."

Amy started to protest but Father Angeles insisted. Ben followed

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along until Amy had been delivered into the hands of a fat Mexican woman with a motherly look. Then he waited while the priest reverently shed his vestments and put them away.

"This is a lovely place to find in the middle of the desert," Ben said. "I don't know these parts as well as I should."

"Where are you from?" Father Angeles asked, brushing the sandy hair back from his forehead.

"The Midwest, originally. But I've been roaming for years now. I guess I don't really have a home." As they passed along a cloistered walkway leading to the monastery, he asked, "How many of you live here?"

"Father Reynolds, Father Canzas, and I. There are only five lay brothers at present, along with a few people to help us out. Mrs. Rodriguez cooks the meals, Luis rings the bells on Sunday, Standing Elk tends to the horses, and Pedro Valdez runs the trading post. The others are passers-by who stop to see us when they're in the neighborhood. Like Amy."

A monk with a boyish face came through the monastery door and Father Angeles stopped to introduce him. "Brother Abraham, this is Ben Snow, a traveler who has paused to rest with us."

Brother Abraham bowed slightly as the priest had done. "A pleasure to have you here. I hope your stay will be a pleasant one."

"I'm sure it will be," Ben told him and the monk continued on his way.

"Abraham," Ben said. "An Old Testament name."

"A presidential name," Father Angeles corrected. "The babies named after Lincoln have come of age now."

"Do you have any trouble with the Indians around here?"

"Nothing since Geronimo surrendered last September. The Apaches were a bother at times, but they seem at peace now. The Pueblos have always been our friends. Large numbers have converted to Christianity, though they cling tenaciously to their ancient rites."

He showed Ben through the monastery with its stark cell-like rooms. "It's almost like a prison," Ben observed.

"In a way, although the spirit is free. The lay brothers like Abraham toil in the fields, and often we're at their sides. One of us says Mass each morning, and generally all of the Indians and Mexicans at the trading post attend."

"A great many Mexicans," Ben observed.

"The border isn't that far from here."

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"Do you know a man named Tommy Gonzolas? He would be half Mexican."

"I believe he's been here from time to time. Why do you ask? Are you searching for him?"

"I've already found him."

As they returned to the mission church, they passed beneath a large crucifix and Father Angeles crossed himself. "You wear your pistol like a gunfighter, Mr. Snow. I hope no harm has come to Tommy Gonzolas."

"The harm had already been done when I found him, Father. I buried him out on the desert."

"May God have mercy on his soul."

"He was a bank robber and murderer, Father. He rode with the man called Poder, whom I've come to find."

"The person who stole Amy Forrest's horse."

"The same one."

"I know nothing of him."

"Was anyone away from the mission this week?"

"There is no way to tell. As I have said, they come and go. Standing Elk might know better than I do—he tends to the horses."

"Yes. I'll have to talk with him again."

"Join us for lunch first. Your questions will flow with more wisdom after a good meal."

The mission food was slight but tasty, and Mrs. Rodriguez seemed to take special pride in cooking for them. Ben was only sorry Amy couldn't join them at the table, but the woman served her a special lunch in the kitchen. Only one of the five lay brothers was Mexican, and since he spoke no English Father Canzas conversed with him in Spanish. The third priest, Father Reynolds, had been a Civil War cavalry officer who'd come west to fight Indians and found God instead.

"I decided it was more important to save their souls than kill their bodies," he said. "But you would have been too young to remember the war."

"I was six when it ended," Ben said. "I'm twenty-eight now."

"You look older—or more mature, I should say. And riding in the sun has weathered your face."

Brother Abraham sat across the table from him, between Brother Franklin and Brother Rudolph. None of them were especially talk-

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ative but Abraham seemed the quietest. Ben wondered what his story was.

After lunch Father Canzas walked out to the trading post with Ben and introduced him to Pedro Valdez, a handsome moustached man who ran the place with a group of half-breed assistants. He joked with Father Canzas, and the fat priest seemed to enjoy what had obviously become a friendly ritual between them. "You are a friend of the Father's?" he asked Ben. "A new friend, surely, or he would have fattened you up to his size by now."

After more casual conversation Ben asked, "Do you know a half breed named Tommy Gonzolas who often comes here?"

"I know him, yes. I know many people."

"He died recently and I'm trying to get word to his close friends. He told me he had a friend at the mission here."

Valdez lit a thin Mexican cigarillo. "You were with him when he died?"

"I was, yes."

"I know nothing about it. He talked with the others, but had no special friends."

Ben remembered the dead horse. "Who around here might ride a pinto?"

"Mottled or spotted horses are common out here, where wild herds still roam and interbreed. Standing Elk must have a half dozen pintos in his corral right now."

Ben sighed. "I only want to give a message to the friend of Tommy Gonzolas. You're not much help."

"I know of no friend."

Father Canzas had drifted away, looking over some of the blankets and trinkets offered for sale by the Indians. It was a meager trade at best, Ben decided, with only a handful of people even knowing of the place's existence—the mission of San Bernardino was not exactly on the regular wagon routes. He wondered if its very remoteness was the reason Poder came here.

"I'm looking for a man named Poder," Ben said finally. "Do you know him?"

Valdez smiled and his eyes seemed to twinkle. "The people of Tosco have hired you to capture him. Yes, Mr. Snow, the word has reached here already. An Indian told me just this morning that Billy the Kid was riding to capture Poder, or to kill him. But you're much too tall for Billy. He was short like me. And besides, he's dead. He's buried over in Fort Sumner, not far from here, where Pat Garrett

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dropped him with two bullets at his girl friend's house." Valdez studied the burning tip of his cigarillo. "Billy should have taken General Lew Wallace's offer of amnesty if he left the New Mexico territory. He met with Wallace, you know, but he refused the offer."

"Is there a message here for me?" Ben wondered. "Should I get out while I can, too?"

The Mexican shrugged. "Where do you think you might find Poder? Do you think it is fat Father Canzas who rides with the mask over his face? Or one of those Indian children playing in the dust? Do you really care?"

"I've come a long way."

"We have all come a long way, Mr. Snow." Valdez turned away as a loud dispute erupted among the children. He shouted something at them in Spanish and they fell silent. Ben turned and headed toward the corral.

There were over twenty horses penned up, but no sign of Standing Elk. Perhaps, he, too, had gone to lunch. Ben wandered back toward the mission and noticed one of the monks hurrying along the cloister. His hood was up and there was no way of identifying him, but there was something about his movements that attracted Ben's attention. He was moving too fast, almost running.

Ben boosted himself over the low cloister wall and followed in the direction the monk had taken. He knew it led to the monastery itself, and as he stepped through the doorway he was aware he was entering forbidden territory. There was no Father Angeles with him now, giving him a tour.

The shadows were deep here, with only an occasional hint of the afternoon sun outside. He moved along the passageway, past the empty rooms where the lay brothers slept. Once he thought he heard a footstep behind him and whirled, his hand on his gun, but there was no one. He seemed to be alone in the building.

Then he rounded a corner and froze.

Straight ahead was a wooden partition, with spiraling bars like a grillwork. A man's arms extended between the bars and then hung down, as if he had been caught in the instant of escape.

It was the Indian, Standing Elk, and he was dead.

Father Reynolds was the first to arrive on the scene in response to Ben's shouts, and he administered the last rites to the dead man. "There's blood," he said as he finished.

"He's been stabbed."

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Father Angeles arrived then, with Brother Franklin. "What's happened here?"

"Standing Elk has been murdered," Ben said. "I should have guessed it would happen."

"You can't blame yourself," Father Angeles said.

"My coming here was the cause of it. Poder killed him before he could tell me who rode here on Amy Forrest's horse."

"I cannot believe this person you seek is hiding here," Father Reynolds said.

"There's the evidence of it," Ben said, pointing to the body.

"If the body is here," Brother Franklin said, "does that mean one of us killed him?"

Ben shook his head. "If Standing Elk could enter this building, so could any other Indian or Mexican. Dressed in one of your robes with the hood up, who would know the difference?"

"There is no sheriff within a hundred miles," Father Angeles said. "What shall we do?"

"Bury him. I'll report it when I return to Tosco. You certainly can't leave the body above ground in this heat."

"We must have a funeral Mass," the priest said, rubbing his sandy hair. "But we have no method of embalming here. He must be buried soon."

The funeral Mass was held late that afternoon, with Father Angeles officiating. While the mission bells tolled mournfully, the people of the oasis filed into the church for the second time that day. Ben sat near the rear of the church with Amy Forrest, watching the ancient rituals. When the priest had finished, another Pueblo, Running Fox, came forward to add some beads and bracelets to the plain wooden coffin Pedro Valdez and his assistants had fashioned.

After it was over, after Ben and Amy had stood with the others in the little graveyard behind the mission, he studied the faces of the departing mourners. But if one was the face of Poder, there was no sign of it. Ben asked Father Canzas if he had a map of the territory. "There's one in our library," the fat priest answered.

He showed Ben and Amy to a book-filled room near the cloister and left them. On a map Ben measured the distance from the mission to the sites of Poder's crimes as well as he could remember them. As he worked, Brother Abraham came in to watch over his shoulder. "What are you doing?"

Ben glanced up from his task. "The man I seek, who probably

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murdered Standing Elk, committed a crime at each of these sites. All are within three days' ride of this mission."

The monk nodded silently, and after a time he left. Ben asked Amy, "Do you know anything about him? He seems a bit strange."

"Just that they say his parents were killed by Apaches when he was ten and he's been here ever since."

Ben returned to the map and she wandered over to the bookcases. "They have quite a library here. Melville, Victor Hugo, Dickens, Hawthorne. There's even a copy of *Ben Hur,* the novel by our territorial governor."

"I'm surprised they'd have Hugo. I heard once that the Church doesn't approve of his novels."

"I don't suppose anyone sees it but the priests and brothers. Most of the Indians and Mexicans probably don't read English."

"Do you think that's why Poder rarely speaks?" Ben asked. "Because his English is limited?"

"I had the same idea when you said this Gonzolas person usually did the talking. I wondered if it was because Poder's English was poor."

"But he talked to you when he stole your horse."

"Just a few words, and they were muffled by his mask."

"There is one other explanation of why he rarely spoke," Ben said quietly. It was something that had been hovering at the back of his mind all day. "Do you have your rifle handy?"

"I brought it into the kitchen when we arrived. It's probably still there."

"Let's go get it."

She seemed puzzled by his request but she went along with it. They found the rifle standing in a corner while Mrs. Rodriguez worked on the evening meal. "We eat soon," she said. "Do not go far away."

"Just outside," Ben assured her.

They walked into the courtyard by the cloister and Ben pointed the weapon toward the sky. "I was saying there was one other explanation of why he rarely spoke. Poder could be a woman."

"I—"

"You might have been riding toward the mission when your horse twisted its leg. You had to shoot him, and when I happened along you feared I might recognize that pinto as Poder's. So you made up the story of his stealing your horse."

"Do you really believe that?"

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"There's one way of testing it. If your story was false, then he didn't empty your rifle at all. It should still be loaded now." He squeezed the trigger.

There was a loud crack as the weapon fired toward the sky.

Amy Forrest stood her ground, staring at him. Neither of them moved for a full minute. Then she said, "I bought some cartridges from Valdez this afternoon and reloaded it. You can ask him if you don't believe me."

He lowered the rifle. "I believe you."

"Poder isn't a woman. It was a man's voice that spoke to me." She turned and went into the house.

Ben stood there for a moment, looking after her. Then he turned and walked out toward the trading post. There were few people around and he went to sit by himself in the shade of a large cactus, drawing letters in the sand.

Presently Father Angeles joined him. "I heard a shot," the priest said. "And I saw Amy. She's very upset."

"It's logical," Ben told him. "She killed Standing Elk not because he saw who rode into the corral this morning, but because he knew no one rode into the corral. He would know she lied."

"Logic is not always the same as truth," the priest said. "If Poder is really here, it is not that young woman."

Ben raised his eyes to stare at him. "You know the truth, don't you, Father? Poder had confessed to you."

"He has not, but of course I could not tell you even if he had." His eyes strayed to the letters Ben had traced in the sand. "What is this?"

"*Poder* and *Pedro* have the same letters. One is an anagram of the other."

"So you have a new suspect in place of Amy."

"Is Valdez the only Pedro here?"

"Yes. But go slowly this time, Ben."

The priest left him as Mrs. Rodriguez summoned them to dinner. But as Ben got to his feet and smoothed over the sand in front of him, he remembered one of the books in the mission library. His education was far from complete, but he had read the classics as a boy in the Midwest. Perhaps part of the answer was in that book.

A sudden movement among the cloisters caught his eye and he saw again the hurrying monk he'd been pursuing when he came upon Standing Elk's body. He broke into a run, intent on catching

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him this time. The man had been spying on him, and that could mean it was the one he sought.

"Stop!" Ben shouted as the cowled figure pulled open the door of the monastery. His fingers reached out, grasping the back of the hood and pulling it off just as the monk was about to disappear through the entrance. And as the figure turned around toward him, he saw what he'd hoped and feared.

There was no face. There was only a cloth mask with holes cut in it for the eyes.

"Poder! We meet at last!"

From beneath the folds of the cloak a pistol appeared. Ben grabbed it, wrestling at close quarters to keep it from pointing at him. There was a shot as a bullet tore past his head, and he relaxed his grip for just an instant. Too close to aim again, Poder swung the gun hard against Ben's temple.

Dazzling lights and a searing pain cut across his head and he felt himself falling. He clawed at the hooded face before him, managing to catch a finger in one of the eyeholes. As he went down, he pulled the mask with him, praying that with his dying breath he would at least see the face of his killer.

And then he saw it—the face of Poder.

It was the face of a man he had never seen before.

As his vision cleared and he returned to consciousness, Ben recognized Amy and Father Angeles kneeling by him. "Who was it?" Amy asked. "Who hit you?"

"Poder."

"Did you see his face?"

"Yes." He tried to stand up. His head hurt, but otherwise he seemed all right. His pistol was still in its holster. "I have to go after him."

"He'll kill you," Amy said.

"He didn't just now."

"We came running and frightened him away."

Ben leaned against the wall to steady himself and then took a few steps. He was all right. He could do it now. "You two stay here," he said.

"Do you know where he is?" Father Angeles asked.

"I know."

He left them and went to the church. Once inside, he found a ladder leading the way up and began climbing. He kept climbing

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until he reached the top of the bell tower, some fifty feet above the ground.

Poder was waiting for him, standing behind the two mission bells with his back to the sky.

"I knew you'd come up here," Ben said. "Luis is your name, isn't it? I remember Father Angeles telling me this morning, *'Luis rings the bells on Sunday.'* I thought I saw everyone at Standing Elk's funeral, but of course I didn't see you because you were ringing the bells then, too."

"You should have stayed away," Poder said. "You shouldn't have come up here."

"I was hired to bring you back."

"Gonzolas told you, didn't he? I was afraid someone might find him before he died, but I couldn't bring myself to kill him."

"He said to listen for the bells and I would find you. I didn't take it quite as literally as I should have. I thought he only meant you were here at the mission. But your mistake was in stealing Amy Forrest's horse."

"I had to take it."

"I know. Your time was running out. You must have had a moment of panic when your pinto twisted his leg and came up lame. But then you saw her, and took her horse. When I thought about it, I asked myself why. You were only five miles from the mission—certainly not a long walk for a man capable of robbing stagecoaches and banks. Why risk showing yourself, even masked, and then leaving the witness alive?"

"I have never killed a woman."

"But why risk it at all when you could have walked the distance in eighty or ninety minutes? Why—unless you had to be back at the mission for some Sunday morning duty? I asked myself what that duty might be. There was the Mass at ten o'clock, of course. Could Poder be one of the mission's three priests? No, because they said Mass daily and Poder had been gone all week, riding three days to Tosco and three days back. He'd been away that long, or nearly that long, before. So he couldn't be a priest, nor one of the lay brothers who worked daily in the fields. Nor Mrs. Rodriguez, who prepared all their meals. But the Indians and Mexicans came and went at will, and certainly wouldn't be missed on Sunday Mass. Only one person was free the rest of the week, to the best of my knowledge, but had Sunday morning duties—Luis, who rang the bells on Sun-

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day. If those bells didn't ring at ten o'clock, people would ask where Luis was."

Poder shifted slightly and Ben saw the pistol in his hand. He stepped a bit to his right, putting the bells between them. "Draw!" Poder said. "The time for talking is over."

But Ben kept on talking. "I suppose it was the view from up here that did it to you. Looking down on all those little people can give a sense of power. Hugo's Hunchback of Notre Dame was a poor deformed crature until he looked down from his bell tower on the streets of Paris far below. It can make one feel like God up here—invincible, with the power to rob and kill. The mask and the silence were part of the image, adding to your legend."

"Draw, damn you!" Poder shouted, and fired his six-shooter. The bullet clanged off the bell, sending tremors through the air.

Ben drew his gun.

He stared down from the tower for a long time, watching the tiny figure on the ground, seeing Father Angeles and Amy running out to where it had landed. The priest knelt in the dust and prayed over Luis's body while Ben watched.

He could feel the power from up here, the power that Luis had felt, and finally he had to look away, toward the vastness of the desert horizon, until he felt small again.

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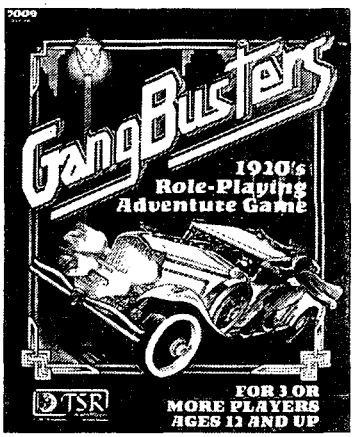

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a *NEW* short story by

MARY BRAUND

"I brought you some cookies," Mrs. Benson said, "as a little welcome. My, aren't you the one, stripping paint. That's just like Mary Sanderson. She painted this whole house all by herself. My husband was very impressed. Of course, he was very impressed with her, anyway. All the men were . . ."

MARY SANDERSON'S HOUSE

by MARY BRAUND

George decided on the house the first moment he set eyes on it. "Perfect," he said, "in every way. Everything about it. Don't you agree, Alice?"

Alice had to agree. It was perfect. Well, perfect for George and what he wanted. For herself? That was a different matter. The house was lovely, no doubt about it, the setting charming beyond words, but here? Out here, miles from town, miles from her friends, from the sort of things she liked to do? That she couldn't be certain about.

The real-estate lady unlocked the front door and they stepped inside, the breeze from the water ruffling the curtains, the sun dancing off the polished surfaces, a faint heavy perfume in the air brushing against them as they pored through the house almost like a presence moving with them.

"It has personality," George said, opening closets, staring around at the walls, the wallpaper bright, the paintwork white and shining. "Bags of personality. Look at that ceiling, look at that. Isn't that something?"

Alice stared dutifully at the whimsical painting on the bathroom ceiling, birds and fish intermingled and entwined in a riotous fan-

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tasy, a silly, almost erotic exuberance leering down at them. She would have to change that ceiling.

"Not quite us, of course," George said, "but different."

He went back to the salt-speckled window in the sitting room. "And the view. Did you ever see a view like this?"

Alice said yes, the view was spectacular.

The real-estate woman knew George was hooked. "The previous owner liked to paint. Not just ceilings. She was a sort of artist, too, I believe."

They walked around the outside once more.

"You should see it in the spring," the real-estate lady told Alice, sensing it was Alice who had to be persuaded. "The rhododendrons are wonderful and that wisteria is a beautiful mauve. Do you like gardening, Mrs. Conroy?"

"Oh, I just putter around. Nothing too energetic."

Alice didn't like anything too energetic. She was a putterer at heart, fiddling in the kitchen, nice little luncheons for her bridge group, nice little dinner parties for George's business colleagues, long detailed letters to her family, working on the needlepoint chair cover that had been underway for three years.

"We can clear a patch of land," George said, "grow our own vegetables, be self-sufficient. We'll get a boat, Alice. We can fish for salmon out on the Sound. Keep goats and chickens. You'll never have to go to the supermarket again."

Alice stared at him wordlessly. She liked going to the supermarket. That was where she encountered friends and kept up with the gossip of the neighborhood.

"Needs a coat of paint," George said, obviously beginning the bargaining process. "And this land at the back is very wet. Should have a drainage ditch, I would say."

"It has got a bit neglected in the past two years," the real-estate woman agreed. "As I told you, the previous owner left suddenly and has never returned. She lives in Italy now." The woman seemed unsure of herself, not quite knowing how to continue. "Anyway, she sent us instructions to sell, and, frankly, I was surprised she was willing to part with the property. I know she was fond of it. It was she who planted all these shrubs. She landscaped it herself. She was a working woman, too. I don't know how she did it all, but she had more energy than anyone I've ever known. Well, anyway—" She shrugged. "She's decided to stay in Italy. I think you could probably get it for a good price, Mr. Conroy . . ."

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It took them two months to buy the house, sell their other one in town, dispose of excess possessions, and move out. It was two months of agony for Alice. She had to agree with George that they should sell the old home. Now that the twins were in college, the house was too big and they needed the money to finance the girls' education. The beach house was a considerable step down in price. And George was so enthusiastic about it, so full of plans, so looking forward to riding the ferry and having every weekend out here. Alice had denied George very little in their married life and she couldn't deny him this.

But she dreaded it. What was she going to do with herself all day while he was gone, leaving at seven A.M. to catch the ferry into town and not getting back home until seven at night?

"You'll love it," George said. "You'll find lots to do, get to know people. Folks are friendly in the country. Just wait until you're settled in and have your own things around you."

They moved in April, just as the rhododendrons began to burst into color all around the house and along the edges of the alderwood forest that towered on two sides of the property. The wide green swathe of grass running from the front porch down to the saltwater pond by the beach was already three inches high and the reeds around the pond were sprouting green.

"I'll have to start by getting that grass cut," George said, as cheerful as Alice had ever heard him be at the prospect of cutting grass. There was an old tractor in the shed at the back of the house, unused for two years, rusting, with one flat tire, and George worked happily on it all one day before it roared into smoke-belching, ear-splitting life. Inside, Alice unpacked boxes, trying to fit her beloved bits and pieces into the appropriate spaces, but somehow they didn't belong, didn't look right in this small old house with the tiny-paned windows and the soft bright light reflecting off the water.

It's never going to work, she told herself in despair. Never. I'm the wrong sort of person.

Later in the afternoon, after George had finished mowing the grass, he insisted Alice come for a walk along the beach. She was glad to be rid of the unhappy task of unpacking, but she didn't care for the gritty feel of the sand under her feet, the tiny scuttling crabs that George turned up from under the rocks.

"We'll eat out tonight," George said. "Don't try fixing dinner. You must be tired from unpacking."

"But I've got lamb chops and a salad," Alice protested.

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George was firm. "We'll go into town and get acquainted."

A hundred yards along the beach, they made their first acquaintances. An elderly couple waved to them from the front porch of a house set back a few yards from the beach.

"Hi, there!" George called. "We're your new neighbors! We bought the Sanderson house!"

"Come on up," they invited and George and Alice climbed over the driftwood to be introduced and offered a cup of tea.

"She's such a wonderful woman, Mary Sanderson," Mr. and Mrs. Benson said, talking like many a long-time-married couple, first one, then the other, finishing each other's sentences. "So competent, so bright, such a worker. It's a pity you missed meeting her." They sighed simultaneously. "We sure do miss her."

"What did she do?" George asked.

"Believe it or not, she was a vice president of the New National Bank in town. She's a real stick of dynamite."

"Vice president of a bank." George was impressed. "Not bad for a woman."

Mr. Benson nodded. "And she'd have gone to the top, believe you me, if she'd stayed around. But I guess she must have found life more exciting in Italy. She liked Italian things—had a little red sports car she used to drive like a demon. And she just enjoyed that old tractor like you wouldn't believe. Used to keep the grass like velvet with it."

"Well, that won't be my Alice," George laughed. "You don't like mechanical things, do you, dear?" Alice shook her head silently. "And that's the way it should be," George said, only half joking. "It's not a woman's job."

They drove the two miles into town that evening. Town was a grand description for the assorted clapboard shops and houses that lined the one main street. There were two taverns and a small diner—nothing fancy, but the tablecloths were clean and the smell of broiling steaks made George's mouth water. The waitress was cute, bouncy, and friendly and she smiled as she took their order. Alice wasn't hungry, but George insisted she have a small steak and a glass of wine. "It will perk you up," he said. "You're looking tired."

"You folks visiting?" the girl asked as she placed the heaping salads and the wine in front of them.

"No," George said, a hint of satisfaction in his voice. "No, we just moved into the Sanderson house. You know, down beyond the bluff."

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"Oh, yes. Mrs. Sanderson's house. It's a lovely place, isn't it? She was a lovely lady."

"*Mrs*. Sanderson?" Alice was startled into speaking. "She was married? Somehow I didn't get the impression—"

"Right," the waitress laughed. "Nobody got that impression. We never saw her husband. I'm sure she got rid of him a long time ago. Wore him out, I bet. She was much too energetic for any man to keep up with." She went off to the kitchen.

Alice sipped her wine. She was beginning to tire of Mary Sanderson.

"Never mind," George said, leaning across the table and patting her hand. "I like you the way you are. I couldn't have lived with a woman like that, either. She'd make a man feel useless."

The waitress brought the steaks to the table, charred on the outside, the blood running from the inside, the way George liked them.

"Mrs. Sanderson was an artist, too, you know," the girl continued. "She did those paintings on the wall there. She ate in here often, and told Bill—he's the owner—he needed something to brighten the walls. Then she brought them in. Good, aren't they?"

Alice couldn't resist getting up from the table to peer at the five framed paintings along one wall of the diner. They *were* good, she had to admit, bold flourishing sketches, deceptively simple. A ferry boat, a crowd of fishermen on a dock, a group of moored sailboats, their masts reflected in the still water, a pair of ducks flying up out of the reeds—and a painting of their house, unmistakable, the long low outline, the grey and white paint, the rhododendrons massed around the porch. No, *not* their house. Mary Sanderson's house.

Alice sat back down at the table and toyed with her steak. Too much to eat. Too rare on the inside.

They moved on a Friday, so George was around all weekend to help with the unpacking, to hang curtains, to place pictures on the walls. He fiddled some more with the tractor, then dragged Alice with him to look for a boat they could use for fishing. They found a marina several miles up the coast and George and the owner spent an hour discussing the alternatives while Alice huddled inside her jacket and felt cold.

He was up bright and early on Monday morning and Alice drove him to the pier to catch the seven o'clock boat.

She watched the ferry disappear in a froth of churning water, the

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early-morning sun glinting off the white hull, the siren hooting as it chugged out of the narrow bay, and she felt utterly bereft. The thought of the empty house appalled her, the day without George or any of her friends stretching long in front of her.

She was tempted with the idea of waiting until the ferry returned and of taking it back into town herself, going to beg a cup of coffee from one of her friends, persuading one of them to lunch downtown with her, wandering around the big stores—anything rather than go back to Mary Sanderson's house. But the thought of having to tell George what she had done with the day—because she had never been able to lie to George—made her realize how foolish she would appear. With a sigh, she turned the car around and drove slowly back the way she had come.

Alice did what she always did when she was bored or unhappy. She took a long hot bath, the radio at full blast, manicured her nails, pummeled the fat on her thighs, added more hot water— She avoided looking at the ceiling. At last, reluctantly, she got out of the tub. Regarding herself in the mirror, she decided she had to go on a diet. Then, instead of making the bed, she climbed in, pulled the covers over her head, and took a nap. When the sun came in through the window, she awoke, and, looking at the bedside clock, she saw with dismay that it was only nine-thirty in the morning.

I have to do something, she thought, dragging herself out of the bed. *Something.*

But what?

Walking around the outside of the house, the silence seeped into her bones. There were no sounds from nearby houses, only a faint breeze ruffling the new leaves of the alder trees, the odd whistling of an invisible bird. She noted how badly the paint was cracked and peeling, the grey on the siding flaking away, the white of the trim dirty and faded into a yellow tinge. She started picking at it with a bored fingernail. The paint came away in long strips. Pulling at it, she soon uncovered a large bare patch by the front door. Interested now, she went in search of a paint scraper. She found a sanding machine and, though she had never used one in her life before, in half an hour she had the area around the door stripped to the bare wood.

Hours later, on top of a stepladder, she heard a voice calling her from below. Turning, she saw the elderly Mrs. Benson from down

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the beach walking up the grass toward her. Alice climbed down off the ladder.

"I brought you some cookies," Mrs. Benson said, "as a little welcome. My, aren't you the one, stripping paint. That's just like Mary Sanderson. She painted this whole house all by herself. My husband was very impressed. Of course, he was very impressed with her, anyway. All the men were."

Alice gritted her teeth. It was bad enough to know how efficient Mary Sanderson was without hearing that she was a femme fatale as well.

"Won't you come in and have a cup of coffee?" she invited, and Mrs. Benson accepted with alacrity. "Why, I'd just love to," she said. "I'm real curious to know how the house looks now, to tell you the truth."

Alice endured an hour of hearing about Mary Sanderson's furniture, Mary Sanderson's gardening ability, Mary Sanderson's cooking, and Mary Sanderson's attractiveness. "Well," said Mrs. Benson at last, "I mustn't keep you from your work any longer. Once started, that sort of thing has got to be finished, hasn't it? I must say, Mary did that painting in no time at all."

Once outside the door, she gave Alice one crumb of comfort.

"You know," she said, looking over Alice's work, "perhaps she did that painting in altogether too much of a hurry. It should certainly have lasted longer than this, shouldn't it?"

I'll show them, Alice thought, leaping back up the ladder. I'll show them I can do something better than Mary Sanderson. I'll do the best job of painting this house any of them has ever seen.

By three o'clock in the afternoon, her shoulders and arms ached abominably and she was desperately hungry. She stopped long enough to grab a sandwich, discarded the sanding machine for the paint scraper, and worked on for hours. It was only the setting sun that reminded her that George's ferry was due and she had no time to wash or change before meeting him.

George was astonished at her appearance. Alice had always been so careful to be primped for his homecoming. And he was even more astonished by the acres of wood she had laid bare. "Good heavens," he said. "I never knew you had it in you, Alice. We could have hired someone, you know."

It wasn't the shower of praise she had expected.

In the ensuing two weeks, rain or shine, Alice sanded. There was

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more of the house than she had realized. Only one-storied, it seemed to go on forever, winding around one corner after another, projections here, a gable-end there. The weather didn't matter while she was getting the paint off, but she hoped it would stay fine for putting it on.

It didn't. May came in, bringing with it cloudbursts and hailstorms, and Alice was driven indoors. She contemplated the idea of painting over the bathroom ceiling, but decided that, after all, she liked lying in her bath under a canopy of birds and fishes.

Gazing up at the ceiling through the steam one morning, she realized with a pang of conscience that it had been weeks since she had cooked George a decent meal. He hadn't complained—what she had been giving him was adequate, if unexciting—but she had noted the slightly pained expression on his normally smooth face after she had served the same casserole two nights running. Casseroles were not George's favorite. She would do a proper shop, find something enticing. Shrimp, maybe, and some decent cheeses. She would stuff beef with garlic and pepper, see if there were any strawberries. Suddenly imbued with enthusiasm, she drove into town, but the local supermarket, more of a general store really, failed to match her expectations. The cheeses were all plastic-wrapped and the vegetables and fruit looked tired and dispirited. The futility of the shopping drained her energy and she dropped into the diner for a cup of coffee.

The same waitress she and George had talked with their first evening was behind the counter.

"Hi, there," the girl said cheerfully. "How's the house?"

"Getting into shape," Alice said firmly, determined not to be told again how Mary Sanderson had done such wonders with it.

"Bill!" the waitress called. "This lady is the new owner of Mary Sanderson's house. Come over and say hello."

A tall, dark man with a curling grey beard and soft brown eyes came from the kitchen and shook Alice's hand. His hand was warm and firm.

"Delighted to meet you," he said politely. "Welcome to the neighborhood. Mind if I join you for a cup of coffee?"

Alice shook her head but she was slightly flustered. Twenty years of marriage to George had left her less than comfortable with a strange man.

He poured a cup of coffee and came to sit beside her.

"Say," he said, stirring sugar into his cup, "I've often wondered

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and I hope you don't object to my asking, but are there any of Mary's paintings still around the house? She used to stack them in the attic and I'd be interested in buying any that are left. She was a good artist, you know. If only she had been able to devote more time to it."

"The attic?" Alice was surprised. She had hardly been aware there was an attic in the house.

"It's not really an attic," Bill explained. "Just a space under the roof. You have to climb up through that trapdoor in the closet off the master bedroom . . ."

"Oh, yes." Alice wondered how he knew so much about the house, but then decided it wasn't really her business. "You know, I've never been up there. There are probably a million spiders."

Bill laughed. He had strong even white teeth under his beard. "Mary never minded about things like spiders."

"I'll look," Alice said. "I'll let you know."

The attic was larger, airier, and lighter than she expected. She had to get the stepladder to climb up there. She was surprised it wasn't more difficult to get through the narrow trapdoor and realized that she must have lost some weight as the result of all the hard work of paint-stripping.

There were canvases heaped against one wall under the tiny screened window at the gable end, and, turning them around to face the light, she found that several of the paintings were only half started. One was unmistakably a portrait of Bill—the face only sketched in and a few brush strokes on the beard, but definitely Bill. She felt a sudden, overpowering curiosity about Mary Sanderson.

Barely able to stand upright under the roofbeams and treading carefully along the four-by-fours that made up the floor, she inched her way over to where a few boxes and a trunk were stored. Knowing it was prying, but unable to resist, she opened the boxes. There were books, phonograph records, a tied bundle of letters, an album of photographs. The trunk was full of clothes—bright, cheerful garments, not the kind Alice would ever wear. In one box she found a set of oil paints, a palette, knives, and brushes.

She stepped gingerly back to the canvases. Of the dozen or so turned to the wall, at least half were completely pristine. On an impulse, Alice hauled one down the ladder to the spare room and

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returned for the oil paints. It was time she tried her hand at something creative.

She stood for a long time, brush poised in hand, staring at the empty canvas. There was nothing she could think of to paint. Many years ago, when it was the thing all suburban housewives did, she had taken a class in painting. The only thing she had ever finished was a still life. A jug, a glass of water, and a banana. It had not been a success and she had quietly dropped the class. But now, thinking hard, she could recall some of the techniques.

Unable to create something of her own, she went back up the ladder and brought down one of Mary Sanderson's works. It was barely begun, but she recognized the tree that stood at the back of the house. After some thought, she sketched in leaves falling, and shadows cast across the grass.

The next few weeks became a race against time, time that Alice had not realized could pass so quickly. When the sun came out, she painted the house. At first she had been going to do it over a chocolate brown, then she decided that the former dark-grey and white was a more pleasing combination. The sun beat down on her back and her face as she moved around the house, very meticulous, determined to produce a perfect finish. When it rained, she retired inside to pursue her artistic endeavors, determined there, too, to do better than Mary Sanderson had done. At first her efforts were pathetic, and time and time again she had to remove her mistakes with turpentine. But she got better. Indeed, she got very much better.

She received complaining letters from her daughters.

"You haven't written to us for weeks, Mom. We never thought this new house would take up so much of your time. Isn't Dad doing anything to help?"

George started to complain.

"Alice, why don't I get any decent food any more? How come you leave me waiting at the dock night after night? Are you sure you're all right? You seem to be losing a lot of weight. Why don't you have your hair frosted any more? I liked it that way. Don't you think you should get it cut?"

She took long walks along the beach. Sometimes she dropped in to see the Bensons to take a cup of coffee with them. One day, old Mr. Benson got out his dandelion wine for her.

"Not many people he offers it to," Mrs. Benson whispered confi-

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dentially as he wandered off down to the basement to fetch it. "He used to offer it to Mary Sanderson. It got to be quite a ritual."

"What was she like, Mrs. Benson?"

Mrs. Benson laughed.

"Oh, she was quite a gal."

"No, I mean what did she look like? I've heard all about her character, but what color was her hair? How tall was she? What sort of clothes did she wear?"

"Well . . ." Mrs. Benson looked thoughtful. "Well, you know, surprisingly, she looked a lot like you. I would never have thought that when you first arrived. You were a pretty enough little thing, I grant you that, but if you don't mind me saying so, you were sort of citified, with your hair and your clothes the way they were and all. But now, well, somehow you've changed. You've got thinner, haven't you, and it makes you seem taller. And I like your hair that way, kind of loose and easy. That was how she used to wear hers. It's gone lighter in the sun and you've got so tan that makes your eyes look bluer. Yes, Mrs. Conroy, you certainly do look a lot like she did. Funny."

"Call me Alice, please."

Mr. Benson came up the stairs, puffing a little, bearing his precious bottle of dandelion wine. Mrs. Benson said, "I was just saying to Alice here, father, how she's got to look a lot like Mary Sanderson. Wouldn't you say that was right?"

Mr. Benson took three glasses from the kitchen cabinet and set them down carefully. He poured the golden liquid into them slowly and deliberately, then turned his attention to Alice. He looked her over and nodded.

"You could say that. Yes, I suppose you could say that. But I'm not sure your George would approve of your being too much like her, Alice."

He took a sip of the wine and they all raised their glasses and drank.

"No, siree," he said, "she was something else, that woman. She had the men around her like flies, did you know that, Alice? We mind our own business and she was no innocent young thing, having been married and all that, but goodness knows who used to come calling at that house. Half the men around here. That Bill Hedges from the diner, now, he had a real thing for her. But I think she liked being on her own, liked being independent. Suited her, you might say . . ."

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It had been weeks since Alice had spoken with Bill at the diner. She gathered up the now finished paintings of the tree and of Bill himself and went in search of him. She found him at his house in the woods behind the town and showed him the painting of the tree.

Bill whistled. "Hey, why didn't I see this before? It's got to be one of Mary's best. Look at those leaves, the way the shadows fall across the grass."

Alice pulled his portrait from the car. He looked at it for a long time. "I never knew," he said. "I never knew she was working on this. She was one hell of a woman."

"Tell me something, Bill," Alice said, at ease with him now. "Was there one thing Mary Sanderson couldn't do well? Was there anything at all she tried and didn't succeed at?"

Bill was still staring at his portrait. "If she had more time, she could have been a good writer," he said absently. She showed me one or two things she wrote. They were awkward. But if she's kept it up, wherever she is, she'll master that, too."

George was complaining all the time now.

"I don't know what's got into you, Alice. You're not like you used to be. You could at least leave the tractor to me. I was planning to rototill the garden myself. Damn it, a man's a man and a woman should be a woman. Look at you! You've turned into a tomboy—at your age, with two grown daughters! I almost think you've forgotten you've *got* children. Sometimes I think you've forgotten you've got a *husband*. And those clothes you wear. Where are you getting them? You know we can't afford clothes like that."

Alice, of course, was getting them from the trunk in the attic.

When the house was painted and the gardening finished for the season, all might have settled back to normal, as George called it, and he was prepared to put up with Alice typing until all hours of the night, but when she sold her first novel—a steamy, sexy book, details culled from the letters in the attic—it was the last straw for George.

"That's it!" he yelled. "I'll be the laughingstock of the company! I can't imagine where you got those ideas, Alice—I can't begin to understand what put them into your mind. What's come over you? You were a perfectly good wife until we moved out here. It was a mistake, I can see that now. We're taking an apartment in town."

Alice shrugged. She really had become very tired of George. Twenty years with one man was quite long enough. There were

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other men around. There was Bill Hedges, who'd been to the house more than a few times in the long sunny afternoons. There was Jim Dunn, who ran the marina. There was Chuck Richards, who had the lumber mill. There was Jack Stacey—

"You're coming with me," George fumed, pointing his finger. I can't afford the upkeep of two homes. You know our financial situation, the girls in college and—"

"There will be the royalties from my book," Alice said. "I can manage here, thank you."

"No!" George shouted, catching a light grip on her arm. "You're my wife and you'll come and live with me! It'll be just as it used to be, things will be just the same!"

"No, George." She tried to free herself. "You don't understand. I'm ready to live my own life."

"Damn it—damn *you!* You're coming with me if it's the last thing you do!"

The sight of his red, engorged face disgusted her. He began pushing her around the room, banging into the furniture, knocking down her easel, sending her typewriter crashing off the desk. If he hadn't done that, her fingers might never have closed on the letter opener. If he hadn't kept on shouting and pushing, she might never have smashed it into his back. She had just wanted to make him leave her alone.

She recognized death when she saw it. Poor George—he had been a good husband once upon a time. She knelt by his body for a long while, wondering what to do. She should call the police, she knew that, but who would believe it had been an accident? Who would believe mild-mannered old George would start hitting her? Who would believe she hadn't wanted to dispatch him when the stories came out about all those other men?

What would Mary Sanderson have done? She covered him with a blanket while she thought about it.

Later, the typewriter back on her desk, she typed a letter because her fingers were trembling, just slightly.

"Dear Girls, Your father has been behaving very oddly lately. I don't think living out here in the wilds has done him any good. Today he announced he was leaving, just like that. Can you believe it? Giving up his job, everything. Mid-life crisis, I think they call it.

"In the meantime, we will have to manage without him . . ."

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When darkness fell, she dragged him out to the place she had been thinking about, where the earth was soft under the tree at the back of the house—the tree in the painting. It wasn't difficult to dig in the friable ground—she was strong now where once she had been weak and useless—but she wouldn't pretend it wasn't spooky and sinister working alone in the dark. It took her a long time, longer than she would have believed, long enough so the moon came up and was almost too bright for this kind of task.

But the moonlight made the job easier, and it was the moonlight that glistened on something shiny when she was almost done. When she knelt and reached down into the hole to pick it up, she was only half surprised to see that it was an identity bracelet, lying next to a skeletal wrist protruding from the earth.

Shining the flashlight on it cautiously, she read the engraved name.

James P. Sanderson.

She threw the bracelet back down into the hole, lowered George as gently as she could in with it, piled the dirt back in on top of him, stamped the ground down, and spread leaves over the soil.

She slept surprisingly well that night, but she dreamed of a little red car and traveling. It was a pity, but she supposed she would have to leave this house if too many questions were asked. In the meantime, she would enjoy Mary Sanderson's house. No, not Mary Sanderson's house any more. Alice Conroy's house.

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a *NEW* short story by

JAMES POWELL

The daily meeting of the executive board of the Grey Berets was back in session with sad-eyed Leon Flacker, the butcher, in the chair. He looked down the line of faces. "Anna Mary Dorn," he said. "Maude Kibbee." He tapped the newspaper on the counter. "And now Butte Montana. I think we're agreed, enough is enough." Then his voice grew solemn as he spoke words never spoken before. "This looks like a case for Captain Sunset."

All eyes turned to the trim, polite-looking, white-moustached man at the end of the line. Alex Scotland had seen better days and had seen worse. He wore the pants of an old grey suit and the jacket of a navy one, hoping they would pass for flannels and a blazer. His face bore the marks of the heavy drinker he had once been. "Captain Sunset'll be there," he promised.

A story both touching and funny, one we hope will be the first in a new series from the phenomenal James Powell . . .

THE DAWN OF CAPTAIN SUNSET

by JAMES POWELL

As night fell on the edge of the downtown business district, old, flat-faced Anna Mary Dorn, her white hair bound up in a bandana depicting palm trees against a gassy blue Hawaiian sky, a plastic shopping bag in each fist, stepped out into the empty street. With a quick look both ways, she set down her bags, bent over, took a firm grip on a manhole cover, and, red-faced and grunting, swung the heavy metal aside. Even beneath the several layers of dresses

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and sweaters, Anna Mary Dorn was a large woman. Years working in the slaughterhouse may not have given her a gay outlook, but her back and arms were those of a husky man.

She swung herself down into the hole, her feet finding the familiar rungs embedded in the masonry. When her eyes were level with the street surface, she reached for the shopping bags, held them between her body and the wall, and dragged the manhole cover back in place. Then she lowered herself and the bags into a small concrete room lined with conduit pipes.

Using a hidden candle stub to light her way, she squeezed into a narrow space where a brace of pipes fed into the room. After a short tight distance, this opening broadened into a shallow bay with a pipe as wide as a bench that carried steam to heat commercial buildings. Here Anna Mary sat out the winter nights in the dark, with her hands folded in her lap and the noise of the traffic overhead almost as comfortable as rainfall. Or sometimes if she had a visitor, she would keep the candle going and make tea over an alcohol lamp from a shopping bag.

Usually her guest was Sister Joe, who ran the hostel for derelict women where Anna Mary went weekday afternoons to watch *All Adam's Children*, a soap chronicling the lives of old Adam Benlow, head of a multi-million-dollar brewing empire (Adam's Ale), and his loving, marrying, divorcing, conniving descendants. She always answered Sister Joe's urgent plea to move into the hostel by inviting the nun to come back for tea, as if to show she had her own place. Sister Joe could never refuse these shy, formal invitations. Once she asked the woman if she wasn't lonely sitting down there in the dark. When Anna Mary told her she passed the time thinking about when she was a little girl, it occurred to Sister Joe that that might be very close to prayer.

But when Anna Mary missed the three episodes of *All Adam's Children* following the dramatic stroke that left old Adam Benlow paralyzed, Sister Joe contacted the police. Two officers were sent down the manhole to investigate. At the bottom they called her name and got no answer. They found Anna Mary Dorn sitting with her back to the bay wall with the tea things around her. She had been stabbed in the heart. The killer had wiped the knife on her sleeve. Her possessions lay in two steep heaps on the floor as though the killer had turned her shopping bags bottoms up.

A day later, following up a complaint about a barking dog, Humane Society people discovered the body of Maude Kibbee, who lived

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in a barricaded apartment in an abandoned building on Chester Street. She had been stabbed in the heart and the shopping bag containing her possessions had been dumped in a tight pile on the floor. The nervous Doberman which had been her companion and protector was found shut up in a closet with a broken chair jammed under the knob.

Sad-eyed Leon Flacker, the butcher, reached over the top of the high white-enamel counter to hand the young woman her change and the brown parcel with the unmistakable heft of meat. Even before the shop door closed behind her, he turned his attention to the five elderly men and women who had stood patiently on the sawdust until he'd dealt with his customer. The daily meeting of the executive board of the Grey Berets was back in session with Flacker in the chair.

He looked down the line of faces. "Anna Mary Dorn," he said. "Maude Kibbee." Taking a hand out from under the bib of his apron, he tapped the newspaper on the counter. "And now Butte Montana."

Last night another shopping-bag lady had been found murdered in the junked step-van where she slept in the lot behind the gutted remains of the King of the Loaf bakery. The quick-tongued, shrewd-eyed old woman got her name from the six-shooter in a tooled-leather holster she wore prominently—"to discourage pesterers," she liked to say. She had probably been shot with her own pistol, which was missing. Her two shopping bags had been emptied out onto the floor of the van.

"I think we're agreed, enough is enough," continued Flacker. Then his voice grew solemn as he spoke words never spoken before. "This looks like a case for Captain Sunset."

All eyes turned to the trim, polite-looking, white-moustached man at the end of the line. Alex Scotland had seen better days and had seen worse. He wore the pants of an old grey suit and the jacket of a navy one, hoping they would pass for flannels and a blazer. His face bore the marks of the heavy drinker he had once been. "Can you get him on the street, Alex?" asked Flacker. "Old publicity hog himself, Deputy Police Chief Smeltzer has called a news conference for three."

"Captain Sunset'll be there," promised Scotland.

Alex Scotland set out down the worn-out street with his dapper step. He had a lot to do. A few years back, with seventy coming up

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on him fast, he had helped found the Grey Berets, his answer to a deteriorating neighborhood he couldn't afford to move from and the butt end of a life he had no intention of throwing away. In the beginning, there was the crime-watch program, the night street patrols, the collective fisheye for the small-time hoods, and the "Your Friend the Policeman" awareness groups.

Later came the Senior Citizens' Prom, the softball team, and the literary lectures. ("This one's on Keats," announced Mrs. Ginty as she introduced one of their speakers, "so listen up those of you who don't know what a keat is.") And "Pacman Shall Not Pass Day." After weeks at the joy sticks of video-games machines donated by a supplier who, though only 62, was trying to wheedle his way into the group, teams of Grey Berets occupied every machine in every neighborhood video-game parlor and kept winning until the young punks squirmed with rage and the parlor owners came to terms. From that day on, no one under eighteen played the machines without identity cards issued by the Grey Berets—requirements: a C average in school and an essay on the theme "What I Want the World To Be Like When I'm Sixty-five."

But if all these things got them some peace and respect on the streets, the Grey Berets still found themselves patronized by the police and ignored by the media. In the celebrated Tyson-Hewlet kidnaping story, for example, there was no public reference to the Grey Beret All-Points Bulletin which put a thousand eyes at the service of the police. Yet that case only broke when a fashion-conscious Grey Beret remarked on the expensive shoes worn by the woman with the baby who had just moved in across the hall in her shabby apartment building.

To be taken seriously, the Grey Berets decided they needed a hero. He would have the strength of many because *they* were many. He would see all and know all because they would *all* be his eyes and ears. The executive committee dumped the project in Alex Scotland's lap.

Who better to create a hero than a man who'd worked all his life as a theatrical agent?

Scotland was glad for the job. A thirty-year battle with the bottle, even a successful one, didn't leave a man much to look back on by way of solid accomplishments. So Scotland gave the cardboard box of his generation's memories a good shake and rooted around inside. Manufactured heroes, even champions of the elderly, are put together like Frankenstein monsters from the parts on hand. Scotland

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assembled his creation from bits of pacemakers and hearing-aids, falling hair and failing eyesight, snapshots of doughboy fathers and roughed-kneed flapper mothers, a withered Depression apple, some sad times, some better days, memories of children, grateful and ungrateful. And he called him Captain Sunset.

Scotland reached the Community Center, a turn-of-the-century grade school built in the elaborate red-brick public-building style some called Scotch Victorian. Beyond the entranceway was the office of the director, Sally Chin, a pretty young woman of Chinese ancestry who thought she had the Grey Berets under her thumb.

"Hey, Mr. Scotland," Sally greeted him through her open doorway.

"Hey, Sally," answered Scotland, hurrying by to the basement room marked SPECIAL PROJECTS, which, though Sally Chin didn't know it, was really Captain Sunset Control Center. Inside, Mrs. Ginty sat with the ankles of her sneakered feet crossed and propped up on the corner of the desk. The phone within reach, a cigarette in her lips, she was knitting a complicated, many-needled design out of a carpet bag.

"Hey, Mrs. Ginty," said Scotland.

Mrs. Ginty snorted. "That little Chin girl's heart's in the right place, but I never know what to talk about with those kids. There's more to life than being cute as a button."

"Now you tell me," said Fernandez, the bald, portly little man sitting in the corner with his beard gripped in one hand. He spoke without looking up from a pocket chess set. Fernandez had known Capablanca in his prime. When he made his move, chess clubs up and down the Coast held their breath. Fernandez supplied Captain Sunset's brain.

"What about Scarnell?" Scotland asked Mrs. Ginty.

"He hasn't left the Eric."

"You mean no one saw him leave," insisted Fernandez.

Bunny Scarnell, a small-time mugger who specialized in shopping-bag ladies, was the prime suspect in the three murders. Scarnell had never killed before but he'd just been released from jail, which seemed too much of a coincidence to the police. Only they hadn't been able to find him. After a Grey Beret APB the night before, a retired doorman spotted Scarnell picking up a schedule at the bus station and followed him back to the Eric Hotel.

"Captain Sunset bows in at three. Can you do it?" demanded Scotland.

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"Argyles can't be rushed," said Mrs. Ginty, looking down into her bag. "Yes, okay, I can do it," she decided.

"I don't like it, Alex," warned Fernandez, his eyes still held by the chess set. "Captain Sunset should make his opening move with a noise like thunder. Not the possible whereabouts of the wrong man."

"Three women are dead. The committee says go with what we've got," said Scotland before turning back to Mrs. Ginty. "Where's our boy at the moment? Where's Clarence Dexter Huntington the Third?"

She consulted a piece of paper. "Teaching a tango class at the Lombard Street library until one."

"Just enough time for me to put some words in his mouth," said Scotland, seating himself at the old upright typewriter on the corner of the desk.

"Clarence is an empty vessel, Alex," said Fernandez.

"Then let's see if we can't fill him with a little of the old Falernian," answered Scotland, stroking his moustache. He anticipated Mrs. Ginty's "Huh?" by adding, "A treasured vintage of another time, Mrs. Ginty. As aren't we all?" But Fernandez was right, of course. Clarence had gotten the Captain Sunset job on looks alone. He had the profile for it, the limberness of a gigolo, and he smiled like his teeth were his own.

Scotland set the typewriter to clacking. For the next half hour or so, the only other noises were the click of Mrs. Ginty's speeding needles and now and then the absent-minded slap as Fernandez killed an imaginary mosquito on his cheek. Fernandez played chess by mail with his brother, an Oblate missionary up the farthest reaches of the Amazon. If they both happened to be concentrating on the game at the same time, Fernandez swore he could feel what his brother felt. And for the pleasure these few moments gave him, Fernandez endured his wood-pushing brother's play.

Scotland looked up from the typewriter. "Thousand-eyed Argus?" he asked.

"Nix," said Mrs. Ginty.

"Classical references are whistling down the rain barrel, Alex," said Fernandez. "With Captain Sunset, we're talking television cameras and tabloids."

Scotland sighed and returned to work. Soon he was tapping the finished pages together on the desk. He headed for the tango class with a pair of argyle socks over his arm . . .

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Empty vessel or not, Clarence was a quick study. While the three Zamboni brothers of the heyday of the circus fame set up the winch and harness, the man who would be Captain Sunset paced the City Hall roof, his lips moving as he recited to himself the words written on the pages rolled under his arm.

Scotland wished he was happier with the champion of the elderly's outfit. Captain Sunset wore cream-and-brown wing-tipped shoes, argyle kneesocks, salt-and-pepper plus fours, a white shirt embroidered with forget-me-nots, a sleeveless sweater with an hourglass pierced through with a thunderbolt in a circle on the chest, and a red-white-and-blue bow tie. He carried a thin bamboo cane with a felt pennant under the hook that repeated the hourglass-thunderbolt emblem. A black-silk mask was parked up on his brow, and above it a flat-topped black hat of the Andalusian style with little red balls hanging from threads all around the broad brim. Scotland had pushed for an old leather football helmet, but Clarence objected. He liked how the hat showed off the way his white hair swept back over the tops of his ears.

"Let's run through it one last time, Clarence," said Scotland. "We lower you ten floors to the little balcony outside the conference room. Then—"

"I hit the harness buckle on my chest and you guys pull it up," recited Clarence.

"Good," said Scotland. "Then you give the French doors a good kick. They'll fly right open. Our people in maintenance have seen to that. You stride inside and strike a pose for the count of ten. Give the TV cameras a chance to find you. Then you say?"

Clarence deepened his voice.

"Who is this masked man, you ask? Just call me Captain Sunset, Tribune of the Golden Agers, defender of the hoary-headed. I am many many yesterdays, every today, and the cutting edge of tomorrow. I am armed with a thousand moxie eyes and the savvy of a million walked streets. At my approach—"

"Et cetera, et cetera," said Scotland. "Skip down to 'My two quick fists are loaded with the weight of years.' There you cross over to the podium. Watch out for the TV cables, okay? And you say?"

"Deputy Police Chief Smeltzer," recited Clarence, "your people are looking for Bunny Scarnell. They will find him at the Eric Hotel, Room 307." Clarence pointed a finger skyward. "From this day onward, those who prey on the elderly will have a rendezvous with Captain Sunset!"

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"Good, Clarence," approved Scotland. "Now here you detonate the red-white-and-blue smoke bomb and slip out into the hall, where Fanny Adams will wheel you to safety, hidden in her cleaning cart."

As Scotland tuned in his transistor radio, the Zamboni brothers hooked up Clarence and helped him over the parapet. "Alex," he said, for even hanging in space he couldn't miss an opportunity to make points with the ladies, "tell Mrs. Ginty the argyles are great." Then he went down on the cable, mouthing his lines and rehearsing his gestures.

"Ladies and gentlemen," came the radio announcer's voice, "we are broadcasting live from City Hall, where Deputy Police Chief Smeltzer is approaching the microphone to make a statement regarding what we have all come to call the shopping-bag-lady murders."

"Fellow citizens," began Smeltzer. "I come before you to announce the end of the reign of terror that has gripped our city these past few days. Early this morning in an alley doorway off Prince Street, police discovered the body of Felix (Bunny) Scarnell, wanted in connection with the shopping-bag-lady murders. He had been shot with what we believe to be the same revolver he used to kill Butte Montana. Pending a ballistics report—"

"Pull him up," ordered Scotland. "Gino, Tony, get Captain Sunset back up here!"

"I almost had Captain Sunset looking like a chump from square one," said Scotland, shaking his head contritely.

"Scarnell was never our man, Alex," said Fernandez at his chess board.

"So you've said all along," acknowledged Scotland. "But the way the police see it, he was stalking victim number four with Butte Montana's revolver. There was a scuffle. The gun went off. Goodbye, Scarnell. Case closed."

Fernandez' shirt was wet under the arms and his beard was damp. "My brother is wading across a stream," he explained, looking up. "To keep his mind off leeches, he is thinking about our game. To keep my mind off my brother trying not to think about leeches, I will tell you who the murderer really is. More or less, of course." He smiled sadly. "First off, Butte Montana wasn't going to let a creep like Scarnell get close enough to grab her revolver. Second and third off, Scarnell didn't have the guts to go down a manhole after a brawny woman like Anna Mary Dorn. Or take on a Doberman."

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"Somebody did."

"Look, Alex," said Fernandez, "Scarnell needed traveling money and he knew only one way to get it. Bad luck for him the shopping-bag lady he picked to mug had Butte Montana's revolver. The question is, where did she get it?"

"You're saying a shopping-bag lady killed the others?"

"Who else would the victims let close enough to kill them?"

"But why?" said Scotland.

Fernandez shrugged. " 'Why' is small enough to fit into a shopping bag, big enough that you'd see it if you dumped the bag without having to stir the pile around with your foot. And whatever 'why' is, she hasn't found it yet."

For a long time after he quit slouching or chewing gum, Alex Scotland would throw back his shoulders and swallow at the sight of a nun. In school they had seemed a race of ageless mermaids who peered in at you through wimpled portholes, straightened your spine with a ruler across the knuckles, or left you as an example to others with a cud of chewing gum in your hair. Sister Joe inspired no such fearful memories. In fact, the modern abbreviated veil of her order made her resemble one of those nurses of the First World War who were the heroines of the trench and aerial dog-fight movies of his youth.

Scotland found her at the hostel, sitting on the edge of the cluster of residents in front of the television watching *All Adam's Children*. ("*The Lives of the Saints* it ain't, Alex," she once told him, squaring her square jaw and fixing him with her practical eye. "But the fact is, without it the ladies and I wouldn't have much to say to each other. They count talking about anything else prying.")

When she saw him, she got up slowly and backed toward him to watch the screen. "This is critical," she explained. "The sneaky Hooper cousins have maneuvered the family into voting on marketing a hard cider, Adam's Apple. Old Adam has the tie-breaking vote. Will he blink once for yes or twice for no?"

A commercial break gave Scotland a chance to bring her up to date on Fernandez' reasoning.

Sister Joe shook her head. "I know my ladies. The grain. The grape. A pill or two. Men. But there's nothing out there worth four murders."

"Maybe a newcomer?"

The nun thought for a moment. "Emily," she said decisively. "Yes,

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Emily just might be different. I first ran into her the week before poor Anna Mary was murdered. She was sitting out there with a bunch of the ladies on the benches in the middle of King Boulevard. A tall, stoop-shouldered one—sad, well spoken. She refused my invitation to come here. She said her friends were putting her up until she found her own place. Then I noticed the crude little cross tattooed on the back of her hand. I'd seen that kind of work before. Inmates in prison have it done. Ink under the skin with a pin or whatever. But that was the first cross I ever saw. I remember thinking at the time that maybe Emily figured the hostel would be too much like living in an institution."

"Were any of the victims there when you saw her?"

"Maude Kibbee, dog and all, come to think of it. I never saw Emily again. Maybe one of the others did."

She returned to the women around the television. In a few minutes she was back. "Emily's been scarce since right after Anna Mary was killed. Some say Butte Montana helped her find her own place. No one knows where. They say they get a glimpse of her now and then moving fast after dark. But they steer clear of her. They think she brought all these bad happenings with her when she came."

As he rose to go, Scotland asked, "What about Adam's Apple?"

"Two blinks. There's a blessing at least," said Sister Joe. "Now if only we knew who was blackmailing young Cissy Benlow."

The Grey Berets called a shadow-picket drill that evening, a method of following a subject without following that they'd been rehearsing for months. On every street corner of a twenty square block area, a Grey Beret would stand keeping the subject in sight until he went into a doorway or alleyway or left the street and was taken over by the Grey Beret on the next corner. Tonight the shadow picket would make an inventory of shopping-bag ladies' roosts which perhaps would lead them to Emily. For his part, Scotland decided to scout out the lot behind the King of the Loaf bakery. Maybe the place Butte Montana'd helped Emily find was nearby. Just in case he got lucky, he brought Captain Sunset along, a raincoat over his outfit, the hat and mask in a paper bag.

The twilight was deepening as they rounded the corner of the burned-out building and came upon a stand of ancient delivery vans like the one in which Butte Montana had met her death. They examined the first three vans and were starting on a fourth when a

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shopping-bag lady hurried around the corner with many wary glances over her shoulder.

As they watched, she crossed the parking lot to where a rusty railroad siding angled through the weeds to the rear of the bakery. The ruins of an immense chimney lay across the siding in broken, fire-scarred sections. The woman followed the siding to a length of fallen chimney on the other side of the tracks. There they saw her duck down and disappear into the weeds.

"I've known them to find stranger places to live, Clarence," whispered Scotland. Then he signaled to the Grey Beret who had followed her in off the street. The stolid, long-faced man wore a leather cap with fur earflaps waiting to be folded down for winter. He seemed impressed when Scotland whispered, "This is a Captain Sunset priority. Get the police over here on the double. Then call the TV station with the Roving-Eye mobile news team. You know, with what's-his-face, the anchorman with the grin up his nose, and what's-her-name, the anchorperson."

"The one whose smile makes your cheeks ache?"

"Right," said Scotland.

"You've got it," said the man, laying a finger on the brim of his cap.

As the Grey Beret hurried off, Scotland murmured, "Clarence, let me go into rewrite here for a moment. Maybe we can wing it and lob a smoke bomb or something."

Scotland scribbled in a notebook for several minutes. Then he said, "We stick with 'Who is this masked man, you ask, blah blah blah' down to 'fists are loaded with the weight of years.' For 'Deputy Police Chief Smeltzer blah blah blah,' you substitute, 'Officers, the blood of four people is on this woman's hands. From this day onward, those who choose to prey on the elderly blah blah blah.' Okay?"

Clarence lay his hand on Scotland's forearm. "The plot thickens."

And it had. Scotland turned to see a second shopping-bag lady starting across the parking lot. She stopped and looked behind her. Scotland thought he caught a glimpse of metal in her hand. "Sit tight, Clarence," he whispered. He couldn't play Captain Sunset games if the killer was going to kill again.

He started after her, keeping to the shadows along the building wall, counting on the element of surprise. As she stooped to enter the section of chimney, he dashed up behind her. "Better let me have that!" he shouted, his firm grip on the warm hamburger in foil she held in her hand.

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The woman cried out and spun around. The hand at her throat was tattooed with a cross. "It's my dinner. Take it," she urged him. "Just leave me alone."

"What are you doing here?" demanded Scotland.

"I live here."

He shook his head. "Kind of snug for two."

"I live alone," she snarled indignantly.

A pistol and a head with long hair and a tam appeared in the mouth of the chimney section. "Freeze," growled a man's voice. "Don't you blink, Dad. And you, lady, just set the shopping bag down and step away from it. Maybe I've finally hit pay dirt."

The man in the wig started elbowing his way out of the chimney. He didn't see Captain Sunset rise from the weeds. The handle of the hero's bamboo cane hooked around the man's wrist and sent the revolver arcing toward the shadows. With a roar, the man burst into the open and lunged for the shopping bag. But Captain Sunset barred his way.

"Who is this masked man, you ask blah blah blah?" he began. The man shouldered him aside and was starting for Scotland when two police cars with screaming sirens turned the corner and bumped across the broken pavement with the Roving-Eye mobile van in their wake. The man turned, cursed, and ran the other way without the shopping bag.

Scotland opened the door and gestured Sister Joe and Fernandez inside. He stuck his head out into the basement corridor of the Community Center and looked both ways before closing the door behind them.

"Holy cow!" said Sister Joe. Stacks of twenty-, fifty-, and hundred-dollar bills lay on the desk.

A tall, stoop-shouldered woman sat nearby, nervously folding and unfolding an empty shopping bag. "A million dollars," she said. "As I just told Mr. Scotland here," she added with a touch of pride, "I embezzled it. I was head cashier. That's what the wedge at my cage said: 'Emily Cusack, Head Cashier.' "

"Tatterfield dressed up like a shopping-bag lady because he knew one of them was wandering around with a million dollars," explained Scotland. "He must have come across Emily on one of her sorties for food and followed her back to the chimney. He decided against a frontal attack. He didn't know what kind of defenses she might have against an intruder. So he waited until the next night. When she

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left to get something to eat, he slipped inside to surprise her when she got back."

"Tatterfield?" said Sister Joe.

Emily Cusack nodded. "Warren Tatterfield's mother was a matron at my prison," she said. "Born again, just like me." She held up the hand with the tattooed cross. "But she prayed too loud for my liking and spread the brotherhood and sisterhood on pretty thick. She said after my release I'd stay with her and her boy until I got settled. She showed me his picture and went on about how all he needed was the love of a mature, God-fearing woman to set him on the path of righteousness and away from his roughneck friends. I knew she figured on getting her hands on the money."

Emily Cusack looked at the stack of bank notes sadly. "For fifteen years I kept it stashed away in a safety-deposit box. Fifteen years. That was my sentence and they made me serve every day of it because I didn't give the money back. Of course, with my religious awakening I'd come to see that money wasn't rightfully mine, but I kept that to myself because Mrs. Tatterfield could have made things real tough for me.

"Then a month before I got out, it looked like fate had taken a hand in the game when Mrs. Tatterfield fell down her cellar steps and died. But was it an accident? Soon afterward I got a letter from Warren Tatterfield saying he'd given his dear mother a death-bed promise to look out for me. He said he'd be waiting at the prison gate the day of my release to drive me anywhere I wanted to go. Well, I took him up on his gracious offer as sweet as pie. But I wrote him I had an afternoon release, though I was coming out in the morning.

"But by the time I'd used my prison earnings to get my hair done, bought some clothes and luggage that didn't wear Prison Issue like a designer label, and cleaned out the safety-deposit box, I was running late. And there was Warren Tatterfield in what I'm sure he called his best suit waiting by the information desk at the bus station, watching the women's faces as my name was paged over the loudspeaker. But I had him there, for I knew what he looked like and he didn't know me. Some older people were loading up for one of those overnight foliage tours and I just marched out with them and then scooted across the platform to the bus to take me here. But jobs are scarce and a prison record doesn't help much. Before long I could see the end of my money."

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"All right, you couldn't spend the million because it wasn't yours," said Scotland. "Then why not give it back to the bank?"

Fernandez smiled and raised his finger as a signal to the others to listen to her answer.

"I'm just not sure it's the bank's, either," said Emily Cusack. "You tell me. Here's the way I worked it. We were a small-town bank serving a farming community. Some of the well-to-do farmers with memories of the Depression when banks folded left and right kept large sums in dormant checking accounts, thinking the banks couldn't loan out what they didn't pay interest on. But of course banks can and do. As Chief Cashier, I was able to open up a number of fictitious savings accounts and move some of that money into them. The money never left the bank. The difference was the bank had to start paying interest on it. That's what I embezzled over a ten-year period, the interest. Today I know that money's not mine. But it's not the bank's, either.

"Anyway, my cash was running out. So I decided to join the ladies I'd seen on the street. I bought some old clothes, loaded the money and my things into two shopping bags, and checked out of the hotel. The clerk did a real double take. I laughed to myself at the time. But now I see it was just another dumb thing that put Warren Tatterfield on my trail. Like buying my ticket on the bus. The driver wouldn't likely forget me or where I'd gone. So here I am and so is Tatterfield and four persons are dead."

"Maybe you could set up a memorial fund for them," suggested Scotland tentatively. "Sister Joe's shopping-bag ladies' hostel is a real worthy cause."

"I'm sorry, Sister," said Emily Cusack, turning to the nun, "the money's just not mine to give away. Maybe that's part of my punishment. I'm responsible for it until I can figure out whose it is."

"Don't try to take too much on yourself," warned Sister Joe.

"Spend the night here, Miss Cusack," urged Scotland. "Tomorrow we'll put our heads together and help you find the answer. Right now we've got another problem. There's a killer out there who might already be stalking his next victim. How do we get back on his trail?"

They were mulling that over when Mrs. Ginty came in, smoking like a chimney.

"You want this report on the shadow-picket operation in the circular file?"

"Bingo!" exclaimed Fernandez . . .

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It was all there in the report. A fleeing Tatterfield had been spotted by a Grey Beret on shadow picket three blocks from the bakery lot. The man was puzzled enough by the sight of a sprinting derelict woman that when she jumped behind the wheel of a car and sped off he jotted down the license number.

Scotland immediately called for a general mobilization ("Captain Sunset priority"). Within the hour, a dragnet located the car on the outskirts of the city at the Ace Motel. The sixty-year-old night clerk, son of a Grey Beret, saw cooperation as possibly his last chance ever to impress his eighty-year-old father who, it was clear to Scotland, was beyond all impressing from that quarter.

The motel was a U-shaped building with outdoor flights of stairs leading to the balcony that ran around the three interior sides. Tatterfield's room was 210, at the top of the right-hand staircase. Scotland called the police. He couldn't risk the killer slipping through their fingers again. But when he'd hung up the phone, he installed Captain Sunset in room 212 and called the Roving-Eye news. Then, with Grey Beret Lefty Lazaire, one-time star pitcher for the Montreal Monarchs of the old Cosmopolitan League, he set up his command post on the balcony across the courtyard from Tatterfield's room. They unscrewed the overhead light, brought out the telephone from the room behind them, and he and Lefty crouched down behind the railing to wait.

The police assault team arrived without sirens and took up positions in the parking lot below the balcony. They made no move to rush the stairs. When camera crews from every television station in town started pulling up, it was clear Deputy Police Chief Smeltzer was going to lead the assault personally. As Smeltzer's car arrived, Scotland placed a quick call to Captain Sunset. Then he phoned Tatterfield's room, posing as the night clerk, and told the man his car was on fire.

Tatterfield burst through the door. As the killer reached the balcony railing, Captain Sunset stepped out to confront him in full regalia. As the crouching, bewildered police raised their guns, as Deputy Police Chief Smeltzer demanded to know who the hell the joker in the mask and funny cowboy hat was, as the television cameras rolled, Captain Sunset delivered his lines with authority and verve, even remembering to substitute "Argus eyes" for "moxie eyes." ("TV and tabloids be damned!" Scotland decided.) But halfway through the speech, the baffled killer recovered himself and lunged,

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hoping to take the champion of the elderly hostage to get by the police.

"Now, Lefty," ordered Scotland.

Lefty Lazaire wound up and let go with his famous fastball, which hurled through the darkness and bounced off Tatterfield's temple. He didn't see what hit him. No one did. Only Captain Sunset knew to expect the baseball.

"Take that, you cur!" he adlibbed as he swung. From where Scotland crouched, Captain Sunset's fist missed Tatterfield's jaw by half a yard. But later in the film footage on the eleven o'clock news, he had to admit the punch looked like a dandy. Tatterfield went down for the count. Captain Sunset approached the railing, waved the pennant, and unloaded that pearly smile of his right into the camera.

"From this day onward, those who prey on the elderly will have a rendezvous with Captain Sunset!" Then he vanished back into his room in a cloud of red-white-and-blue smoke. By the time the police broke in the door, Captain Sunset had disappeared out the bathroom window and into the bucket of a cherry-picker supplied by Thorwaldson Tree Surgeons.

Alex Scotland came down the dark street with a long, celebrating stride. As he reached the sidewalk in front of the Community Center, young Miss Chin was locking the front door. "Hey, Mr. Scotland," she greeted him. "You want something inside? I'll wait."

"Hey, Miss Chin," he answered. "No, thanks, I'm just passing by. Let me walk you to the subway. You're working late."

"Sometimes the paperwork gets backed up," she said as they started off. "Why're you out so late?"

Scotland waved the bottle of seltzer water in a paper bag. "Shopping," he said.

They walked in silence for a moment. Then as if to make conversation, Miss Chin said, "Ever notice how there's never any paperwork on television?"

"Who do you think's blackmailing Cissy Benlow?"

"Elroy Hooper or I'll eat my shirt," said Miss Chin. "Oh, say, Emily Cusack, the new lady? She left earlier this evening. She told me to say thanks and goodbye. She said it was time for her to pack up and move on."

They had reached the subway entrance on the corner. "You okay, Mr. Scotland?"

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"I'm fine, Sally," said Scotland, forcing a smile. He watched her go down the steps and then walked back the way they had come.

Damn, he wished he'd had the words to make Emily stay. Maybe they didn't know any better than she did who the money belonged to. But at least she'd have been among friends. He stared off down the street in the direction of the bus terminal. Heaven help you, Emily—a woman with a million dollars you won't touch because it isn't yours. When the papers come out tomorrow you'll need all the Captain Sunsets you can get, wherever you are.

A small group with parcels in their arms had gathered at the Community Center door. Mrs. Ginty, Fernandez, Clarence, and Lefty Lazaire. Well, why shouldn't there be a little get-together to celebrate Captain Sunset's maiden voyage?

Scotland pulled out his keychain. Hey, Miss Chin, he wondered sadly, would it really bother you to know the Community Center doesn't close down when you lock the door?

DETECTIVERSE

FIT PUNISHMENT

by JAN GLEITER

A woman whose spouse was untrue
Came home long before she was due.
Lingerie on the rug,
Which was far far too snug
For herself, finally gave her a clue.

Now this was too much to ignore,
But she knew how to even the score.
She bashed in his head,
Then truthfully said
That he died from a slip on the floor.

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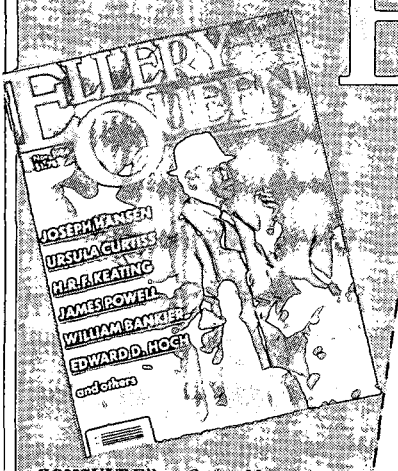

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First story author #622, Joan McAteer, is a retired secretary married to "a real neat Irishman" and the mother of three sons. Her desire to write stemmed from a creative-writing workshop sponsored by the humanities foundation at her local library in West Virginia, and when her youngest son entered school three years ago she enrolled in additional writing classes at a local college. Her essays and other nonfiction have been published in a local newspaper and a national magazine, but "She Knows" is her first professionally published fiction. Her narrator is an auctioneer's dream . . .

SHE KNOWS

by JOAN McATEER

Auctions? Can I ever tell you about auctions. They're the reason I have a six-foot slab of marble under my bed and three buffets, two breakfronts, a wine cabinet, and two sideboards in storage. They are also the reason I have a round oak table, two stack-bookcases, and an English washstand stashed in a friend's basement and six saddle-back chairs, a tea cart, and a library table in my own basement, along with two spindle-back rockers and a hatrack suspended from the ceiling. This says nothing of that which lurks between yonder attic walls.

I'm sure I was an auctioneer's absolute dream. Starstruck by merchandise that dazzled beneath tricky stage lights, I fell victim to the spell. Now the so-called "spell" is when you're fully aware of what you're doing but are powerless to stop yourself. On my first night at an auction, the auctioneer began by explaining terms such as "one of a kind," "all for one money," "signed piece" (indicating authenticity), "bidder's choice," "consignee's lot," "tie-bid," etc.

Impressed with how openly he educated his audience, I followed

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his instructions and secured something resembling a Ping-Pong paddle with a big #50 on it. I know today that allowing that clerk to talk me into a permanent paddle was my downfall.

I took a seat in the front row. It only happened once, but I waved to ask a question concerning a piece of pottery on the stage and ended up being told that I had just purchased the sixty-five assorted dresser-knobs being auctioned.

For a while I sat on my paddle. Then the auction began. Almost immediately I found myself continually bidding against #13. It seemed she never bid until after I had requested that a particular item be put on the block, then she began bidding, too. The first time we locked horns was when she snatched a Queen Anne footstool right out from under my bid. Then she outbid me on a brass coalhod I had earmarked for my hearth, as well as a Haviland teapot. The crystal salt-cellars I could live without, and the bisque figurines, but when she initiated some catchy hand jive and took the bid on my mahogany organ chair, I got mad. I squared off, determined to jump every bid she made, come what may.

The bidding started up again. When #13 bid $10.00, I jumped it $10.00. When she upped my bid $20.00, I retaliated with $25.00. And so it went. When the bid had reached $165.00 with me ahead, she set down her paddle and took to the snack bar. It was then the auctioneer announced that #50 was top bidder on the four-piece set of lawn furniture offstage. While he described the pieces, she sat nonchalantly munching Fritos from under a large-brimmed black hat. The witch. I learned later from one of the loaders that #13 was none other than Lydia Fairchild, who did this for a hobby. Seething, I drove home with an image of the number thirteen burning in my mind—as well as a gaudy Mexican birdbath lodged between the front and back seats of my car. For six weeks thereafter, that monstrosity went everywhere I did. I ended up selling the remaining pieces back to the auctioneer for $80.00.

My next venture was a country auction my husband attended under protest. The only problem, really, was the glaring sun that prevented a clear view of the merchandise. Whenever I bid, the auctioneer would murmur, "She knows." I didn't know what it was I knew, but his comment spurred me on. I bought three items that day—a leather harness with big brass knobs which I have to this day been unable to convert to a multiple plant hanger, a rusty lantern with a busted chimney that reeked of kerosene, and a supposedly late-1800s walnut bachelor's chest. When the auctioneer

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announced, "It's signed" and then added, "She knows," I kept bidding.

The trip home was horrible. The ropes kept slipping, and every few miles that chest slid backward from the roof onto the rear window of my husband's new company car. Four times we pulled over to secure the ropes.

Upon closer examination at home, my husband was not only unimpressed, he actually growled, sounding much like our tomcat just before he jumps the starlings. That chest had been signed all right—with chicken splatter. In every drawer.

One night I made the blind bid on an entire trunkload of supposedly valuable dolls. The auctioneer pulled another "She knows" and I bit. I ended up with one antique doll dressed in calico, which the auctioneer displayed on stage, and eighty-nine others, sight unseen—all of which were plastic and naked.

Faced with fear of having to forfeit my checkbook, turn in my credit cards, or refrain from attending auctions, I decided to recoup my losses and reap a profit by putting merchandise back into the auction. And so I did. The auctioneer explained the system and concluded with a reminder that it was illegal for me to join in the bidding for any of my own items. But I knew the minute this greenhorn auctioneer walked out on the stage eating popcorn that there was something rotten in Denmark. As he walked on, #13 walked in.

"Don't know what you folks see in this here old furniture," he whined, scratching his head, "but we're gonna let you have at it." What happened was nothing less than catastrophic. The following is a replay of some random items as described by the auctioneer when I *purchased* them as opposed to the description given that night our greenhorn *auctioned* them:

My ten-drawer rosewood armoire with brass pulls, ball and claw feet, and beveled-edge mirror was described as a clothes closet with lots of space for socks and underwear. It went for exactly twenty percent of the purchase price.

My marble-top oak Welsh cabinet with ornate brass pulls, beveled mirrors, and rose-carved doors was described as a kitchen cabinet that would hold plenty of canned goods.

My pink-velvet Lincoln loveseat with matching armchairs was described as a cute little couch for Mommy and Daddy to watch TV on, with extra chairs for the kids.

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My leaded slag shade of 1865 vintage was described as being good for playing poker under.

My matching pair of rare porcelain Foo dogs from China were described as glass doggies that would make dandy doorstops.

My Bavarian chocolate set he described as "a purdy little pot with teensy-tiny cups nice for fixing Kool-Aid in for the kiddies."

My *Gone With the Wind* lamp with five-inch cut-glass prisms he described as real nifty, adding that "When you jingle them purdy little hangy-downs together, they sound like tinkle bells."

The ogre even auctioned off my pocketbook, the lining of which housed my three-year collection of auction stubs.

Even in my state of shock, I was conscious of the recurring phrase, "Number thirteen buys it! Number thirteen buys it!"

In the weeks that pursued, I lay awake nights plotting my revenge. Nothing physical, just enough to let #13 know that #50 was only sleeping and not yet dead.

Then one day I noted on the society page that the Fairchilds' annual dinner party was slated for the following Saturday evening. On the opposite page I spied an auction notice on "ultra primitives" to be held out-of-doors the previous Friday evening at our regular spot.

With great cunning, I arrived early on the Friday, met with the alternating auctioneer, and made a blanket bid on twenty-two sections of fencing (barbed-wire and posts intact), along with thirty-six cases of unwashed canning jars. When visions of a pink Lincoln loveseat charged my memory, I added those six quaint old milk cans, the plow, and three rusty wheelbarrows.

Confident in my wide-brimmed black hat, I stated emphatically that delivery must be made late the following afternoon with special instructions that the merchandise be deposited at the entrance to my drive. "Just bill me as usual," I instructed, looking over my dark glasses. "My permanent paddle is number thirteen."

"Vengeance is mine," sayeth #50.

"Q"

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Deborah Patterson was missing and her mother called in Faith Conrad to find her. Faith's investigations were usually industrial-espionage cases, because as a woman who could type she fit easily into the office environment. The Patterson Foundation practically supported the city's ballet and the symphony and numerous other cultural and charitable causes, and finding Alvina Patterson's daughter should do great things for Faith's bank balance.

Titled "The Abduction of Deborah P.," the following story was one of three winners in a hard-boiled-mystery-writing contest sponsored by The Maltese Falcon Society at the 1983 San Francisco County Fair. The author, Barbara W. Knowles, teaches parenting classes for the San Francisco Community College Centers and writes free-lance articles on child care. Like Joan McAteer, she is the mother of three sons, but hers are now grown—"and now," she says, "I seem to have given birth to a female detective. Perhaps she's the daughter I didn't have. Perhaps she's the beginning of a new career. I may start the novel tonight—after Remington Steele . . ."

SISTER FAITH

by BARBARA W. KNOWLES

I sat at my desk, if you can call a card table with a typewriter and a phone on it a desk, and watched the fog slide over the top of Twin Peaks and pour down into the Mission. Four months ago, I discovered that I could pay rent on my Market Street office or on my Potrero Hill flat, but not both—so, since the office had neither a bedroom nor a view, I opted for the flat. I didn't get much drop-in trade, anyway. Most of my jobs come from referrals. I've had some

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success in industrial-espionage cases in Silicon Valley and employee thefts in the city and word gets around. I fit easily into the office environment because I'm a woman and can type, and people never expect detectives to be women or typists. It isn't terribly exciting, but it feeds me, runs my car, and buys my ballet tickets, even if it doesn't pay two rents at San Francisco rates.

The fog was at the bottom of the hill creeping toward S.F. General when the phone rang. "Faith Conrad," I said.

"This is Alvina Patterson," said a crisp female voice. "I picked your name from the phonebook because you're a woman. I want you to find my little girl for me."

"Ma'am, for a missing child you should go to the police. They have far greater resources than a private detective."

"She was thirty-two her last birthday and I don't want any publicity. Can you come to my home? I have arthritis—it would be difficult for me to come to your office."

Alvina Patterson hadn't made the society pages much in the last ten years, but the Patterson Foundation still practically supports the city's ballet and the symphony and numerous other cultural and charitable causes. Finding her "little girl" should do great things for my bank balance.

The address she gave was in St. Francis Woods, three or four blocks from the mayor's house. A Filipino maid in a black-and-white uniform led me into a room I'd have called the library if I lived in a mansion. A fire was burning in the marble-faced fireplace, the fog getting to St. Francis Woods before it hits Potrero Hill. A white-haired woman in a wheelchair spun around to face me as I entered.

"Sit down, Miss Conrad." Her voice sounded younger than her face looked. "Thank you for coming so promptly."

"I'll need to know all about your daughter, Mrs. Patterson. When she disappeared, who her friends are, places she usually goes."

"My daughter, Deborah, is retarded. Not severely. She has learned to dress herself and care for her own needs—she can read simple things and do most kinds of housework. Indeed, she has been very helpful to me since I became crippled with arthritis. But she is still very much a child. She has always lived at home. I had tutors come in to educate her within her capabilities. She never goes out without an escort and I never leave her at home alone.

"She didn't come down for breakfast this morning. I sent Justine up to see if she was ill and she wasn't there or anywhere in the

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house. Until I called you, I had Justine and Joseph—(he's my driver)—searching the neighborhood. You must find her, Miss Conrad. She cannot survive in the outside world."

"I'll find Deborah, Mrs. Patterson. But my fee is two hundred a day plus expenses, and I need a retainer."

Mrs. Patterson took a bound checkbook from a nearby table and wrote. "This is for a thousand, but please don't dawdle for five days. Deborah must be found at once."

"I'll need a picture. And I'd like to look in her room. I'll want to talk to Justine and Joseph. After that, I may need to talk some more with you."

Mrs. Patterson touched a button on a miniature transceiver in her lap. "There's a picture of Deborah on the table by the window."

It was a formal portrait done by a good photographer. Deborah had dark hair parted in the center and pulled back into a bun. Her features were those of a younger Mrs. Patterson, except for the eyes, which were blue and seemed to be staring into deep space.

"Is this recent?" I asked.

"Last September," said Mrs. Patterson. "The photographer came to take my portrait for a hospital wing I donated and I had him do Deborah at the same time."

Justine was waiting in the doorway. "Justine, take Miss Conrad to Deborah's room and then see that you and Joseph are available to talk with her when she is finished there."

The room didn't look like it belonged to a thirty-two-year-old woman. It was all pink and white. Everything that could have a skirt on it had a skirt on it—even the wastebasket. One wall was all shelves, most of them holding a sizable doll collection. A teddybear sat on the pink-and-white bedspread. The pictures on the wall were of old-fashioned girls at play. It was a fantasy little girl's room. All it lacked was a rocking horse. But there were a few incongruous items. The books crowded on the bedside stand were all gothics and romances. I found an ashtray with ashes and butts inside the top dresser drawer and a matchbook from a place called The Glass House on Haight Street. And there was a pair of black panties hidden under about two dozen pristine white ones in the second dresser drawer. It looked as though Alvina Patterson's "little girl" had a fantasy life that was at least adolescent, if not thirty-two.

Justine and Joseph were married and had been with Mrs. Patterson for seven years. They had an apartment in the back of the house. Justine took care of the house and cooked—Joseph did the

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gardening and drove the car. A cleaning woman came in twice a week to do the heavy stuff. A physical therapist and a nurse came in daily to care for Mrs. P.

Deborah sometimes helped her mother bathe and dress, and the two of them spent a great deal of time together playing checkers, doing needlepoint, and watching TV. Mrs. Patterson didn't have many guests and Deborah had none—as far as Justine and Joseph knew, she had no friends except her mother. She went out only when Joseph took her and her mother out in the car and, with Justine, on her weekly trip to the supermarket. When Mrs. Patterson entertained guests at dinner, which was seldom, Deborah was introduced when they arrived, then she ate in the kitchen and spent the rest of the evening in her room. Sometimes when Mrs. Patterson took a nap, Deborah would come to the kitchen and talk to Justine about TV programs, books (Justine was the source of the gothics), men, and the world outside the house. In Justine's opinion, Deborah was not particularly handicapped. "Maybe she's not smart, but she's not dumb, either. She can read. She can add and subtract. She doesn't know much, but what chance does she have to find out?"

Did Justine think that Deborah could get along in the outside world?

"Sure. She'd need help because she don't know the good guys from the bad guys, but she'd get along okay. A few weeks ago she asked me how to take a bus and repeated it right back to me after I told her once."

"What bus did she ask about?"

"It was to someplace on Haight Street. I remember because you had to transfer and I had to look it up on my Muni map."

Mrs. Patterson was napping when I finished talking to Justine and Joseph, so I left word that I'd call her later and headed for The Glass House on Haight. It was in the middle of the Haight-Ashbury. It took twenty minutes to park my car. With a $1,000 retainer, I suppose I could have risked a ticket, but habits die hard. The Haight is still pretty lively—but nothing compared, I guess, to the flower-child era of the Sixties. I was in high school in Topeka, Kansas, in the Sixties, so I can't verify this first hand.

The Glass House was a pizza place with stained-glass windows and Tiffany-style lamps. I checked the customers out first on the chance that Deborah might be there, but she wasn't, so I found the manager, showed her Deborah's picture, got a negative, and asked her if I could talk to the help if I didn't get in the way. She said

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yes—if I didn't get in the way. I watched as they took orders, cleaned tables, and delivered pizzas to happy-looking customers. The pizzas were the deep-dish kind with gorgeous brown crusts and I remembered that I hadn't eaten dinner yet.

The third waiter I talked to recognized the picture. "She's been in here several times. I remember her because the first time she was here she asked me how much tip she owed me, and when I told her the usual was fifteen percent she asked me to figure it out for her."

"Does she usually come in with someone?"

"She was alone when she asked about the tip, but I think she was with someone the other times. Yeah. A long-haired woman and a priest with a beard."

"You know who they are?"

"No, but someone else might. They're regulars. I'm only part-time."

"Were any of them here last night?"

"I don't know. It was my day off. Ask Nicky—the guy with the moustache over there. He was probably here."

Nicky had been and he said yes, the three of them had been in between ten and eleven the night before. He thought the woman and the priest came from some kind of oddball church that operated from a storefront someplace in the neighborhood:—the "Something-or-other Tabernacle." He didn't like them. They didn't come in often but when they did they never tipped a dime. Deborah was a funny one. She tipped exactly the same no matter what she ordered.

I decided to have one of the pizzas and a glass of the house wine. I overtipped Nicky and told him to share it with the waiter who gave me the first lead. While I ate, I borrowed a phone book, but I couldn't find anything that sounded like the "Something-or-other Tabernacle" listed under churches. When I finished, I called Mrs. Patterson to report on my progress. Her crisp calm voice ordered me to return immediately. Someone had just dropped a ransom note in her mailbox.

I handled it by the edges, although it was probably wasted effort. Even amateurs know about surgical gloves, thanks to TV. The only prints the police would find would be Justine's and Mrs. Patterson's. As it turned out, the police weren't going to be allowed to try—Mrs. Patterson flatly refused my suggestion to call them in. The note was the standard letters-cut-from-magazines-and-pasted-together type

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and very brief, probably because of the effort involved. "We have her. Get 250,000. Small bills. Wait for call. No police."

I told Mrs. Patterson about Deborah being seen at The Glass House and the man and woman with her and she said it couldn't possibly have been Deborah because Deborah never left the house, would have no means to get to the restaurant and no money to pay for the pizzas, and why was I wasting precious time looking in restaurants in the Haight. I told her about the matchbook and Deborah asking Justine how to take a bus. After that she looked thoughtful. I got my tape-recorder out of the car and rigged a bug on the phone so we could record the kidnapers when they called.

"Can you get the money?" I asked Mrs. Patterson.

"I can tomorrow. I'll have to sell some stocks."

"They probably won't call until tomorrow—they know the banks are closed. If they do, tell them you can't get the cash until noon and they won't get a thing until they prove that Deborah is alive."

"Do you think they might kill her?"

"That's always implied in a kidnaping, Mrs. Patterson."

She hit the transceiver button and told Justine to bring her pain pills.

"Did—does Deborah get an allowance, Mrs. Patterson?"

"No, she has no need for money."

"How might she have gotten the money for the bus and pizzas—if the woman the waiters identified was Deborah?"

"I suppose she could have gone through my purse. I don't keep close track of my loose change. And I keep a box with small bills and change for Justine to pay delivery people. She puts receipts in to account for it, but I never check. Justine is trustworthy."

When Justine arrived with the pills Mrs. Patterson asked if she had noticed any money missing from the slush box.

"Yes, ma'am. About fifty dollars. I thought you'd forgot to put last month's money in. I didn't mention it to you because there was still plenty left."

"Fifty dollars," I said. "It won't go very far, but it would buy a few pizzas and Muni rides."

At 1:30 A.M., I left Mrs. Patterson sitting beside the phone, doped up on pain pills and thinking about her missing little girl, and drove back to the Haight to cruise around for a while and try to spot the Something-or-other Tabernacle. It was a bit late to walk around and ask people if they knew it. I have a gun, but it was safely locked in

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a box at home, and I haven't had much opportunity to put my self-defense training to work running down stolen typewriters.

After fifteen minutes, I spotted a building that was probably it: Beyond the Stars Universal Tabernacle. The name was painted in silver letters across the storefront window. In the dark, the rest of the window looked as if it was painted black or navy-blue with little silver stars scattered here and there. Even at that hour I had to double-park. There were no lights inside. The door was locked with a high-quality deadbolt. I heard no sounds. So back to Potrero Hill, my view of the lights of half the city, and bed.

The kidnapers hadn't called by noon the next day, so after I deposited Mrs. Patterson's retainer in the bank I returned to Beyond the Stars Universal Tabernacle. This time I found a parking place in ten minutes. The door was wide open so I walked in. The room behind the painted window was painted black—ceiling, walls, and floor, with silver stars sprinkled all over, even on the floor. Some metal folding chairs were lined up before a stage on one side of the room. On the stage was an altar draped in black. The stars on the wall behind the altar were formed into the big dipper. On the other side of the room were several black canvas director's chairs and a black desk. In one of the chairs sat a big black man with a shaved head, dressed in a black robe. Black jeans and expensive-looking hiking boots showed beneath the robe.

"Welcome beyond the stars, sister," he said. "I'm Brother Abraham. I don't think we've met." When he stood up to shake my hand, he was nearly seven feet tall.

I hadn't prepared a cover story, so I came right out with it. "I'm looking for a young woman named Deborah Patterson." I showed him the picture. "Some waiters at The Glass House said she ate there last night with people from here. I'd like to ask them if they know where she is."

"No need to look any further," said Brother Abraham. "Debbie is here. May I ask why you're looking for her?"

She was here? Just like that, she was here? "I'm a detective. Her mother hired me to find her." I handed him my identification. "May I see her?"

He examined my I.D. carefully. "Certainly, Sister Faith. But we need to talk a little first. Please sit down."

"Talk away," I said, sitting. "What is Deborah Patterson doing here?"

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"Some members of our group," he began, "eat at The Glass House from time to time. I suspect they like the colors in the stained glass after the unrelieved black here. Two or three weeks ago, Brother Michael and Sister Susan noticed Deborah eating at a table by herself. She looked frightened and lonely, so they joined her. I don't know whether you know or not, but Debbie is very innocent and unworldly for a woman in her thirties. It seems her mother has kept her shut up at home all her life—she's never gone to school or anyplace else. The only knowledge of the world she has is from television and reading gothic novels, which I think you'll agree is an inadequate preparation for life."

"She's retarded," I said. "Her mother has kept her in for her own protection."

"She's not retarded," said Brother Abraham. "Dull normal, maybe. In one of my previous existences I held a doctorate of psychology and that young woman is not retarded. Do you know her?"

"No. Mrs. Patterson hired me only yesterday."

"I don't know what Debbie's mother's motives were for keeping her penned up. I would like to have studied *her* in my previous existence. Last night Debbie told Brother Michael and Sister Susan that she was running away from home and asked them where she should go. So they brought her here."

"It's a relief to find her safe. May I see her now?"

"Yes, but we won't let you take her back to her mother unless she wants to go. Sister Susan was a civil-rights lawyer in her previous existence and we intend to see that Debbie's rights are protected."

He stood and led the way to a cheerful white kitchen in the rear, with a glass door opening onto a garden filled with purple cineraria. Deborah was standing at a wooden table kneading dough. Another woman and a bearded man were shaping other dough into loaves and putting them into metal pans.

"Debbie," said Brother Abraham, "this is Faith Conrad. Your mother sent her to find you. Sister Faith, this is Sister Susan and Brother Michael, Debbie's friends."

"Do I have to go back?" Deborah asked, looking from me to Sister Susan and back at me.

"No," said Sister Susan.

"Not necessarily," I said. "But I'll have to tell your mother where you are. Did you come here because you wanted to? Did these people do or say anything to make you come?"

"Oh, no. I wanted to come. I've never been anyplace except home

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and the supermarket and The Glass House, and I want to go everyplace. Sister Susan says I can get a job and learn to take care of myself and can stay here until I do. Please don't take me back."

I turned to Brother Michael. "It certainly sounds as though she's here voluntarily. May I have your statement that you will release her if she, of her own will, decides to leave without any payment to Mrs. Patterson?"

"Payment!" said Brother Michael. "Are you kidding? We're not in business to deprive old women of their social-security checks. It'll be hard enough on her having Debbie leave."

"Is that your policy, too?" I asked Brother Abraham.

"Of course. In fact, unlike most churches, we're not in need of money. We're into rehabilitation of drug abusers and have grants from six foundations."

"Then why the ransom note?" I asked. Though I thought I already knew the answer. The genuine surprise on all their faces confirmed it.

"What ransom note?"

"Mrs. Patterson received a ransom note asking for a quarter of a million dollars."

"Debbie's mother is worth a quarter of a million dollars?" asked Brother Michael.

"Considerably more," I said. "She's Alvina Patterson."

Brother Abraham shook his head in wonder. "The Patterson Foundation is one of our sponsors." Then he laughed. "I guess we'll be looking for a new one."

I was about to leave when a thought occurred to me. "Why did you go to The Glass House in the first place?" I asked Deborah. "It's a complicated bus-trip from your home."

"I saw it on TV. It was advertised on a *Laverne and Shirley* rerun."

Never underestimate the power of the media.

In her relief that Deborah was alive and well, Mrs. Patterson took it better than I thought she would. But of course she was still wary about the ransom note. "Are you sure they didn't send it?" she said.

"As sure as I can be. The police could do a better job of checking, but you've said you don't want them. Whoever wrote the note hasn't called, but if they do you can tell them to go to hell. I can keep on looking for them, but I suspect it was someone who saw Deborah at the Tabernacle, recognized her somehow, and decided to try his luck with you."

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"Don't investigate further. I'll have Joseph drive me to the Tabernacle now so I can see for myself that Deborah is safe and happy. I must arrange an allowance for her—she should not be a burden while she is preparing to work, and I want to tell Brother Abraham he will not lose his grant. —It's a terrible thing, Miss Conrad, a mother ashamed of her own child. I have lived with that for years. And now I shall miss her. Since I've been in this chair, I've come to enjoy her company. But she has made a choice—one I should have let her make ten years ago. One of the advantages of wealth is that I will be able to hire someone to care for me and talk to me. But it will not be my daughter. It will not be Deborah." She touched the button of her transceiver and Justine came to see me out.

"I'll send a refund for the unused part of your retainer," I told Mrs. Patterson.

"Thank you," she said. "I appreciate your efficiency and you may use me as a reference any time."

Of course I had hoped she would tell me to keep the money—a thousand dollars isn't much to her—but then I don't know why she should have.

As Justine opened the front door for me, I said, "Why did you and Joseph write that ransom note?"

She turned pale. After some thought she said, "Please don't tell her, Miss Conrad. We would never harm Deborah. We love her. How did you know it was us?"

"I didn't for sure. But not many people knew she was missing."

"It wasn't for us. Joseph's family in the Philippines is very large and very poor. We send them everything we can, but it's never enough. And Mrs. Patterson has so much more than she can use. She gives it away. But she seems unaware of the need of people under her roof. When she called you instead of the police we thought maybe we could collect some money before you found Deborah and Mrs. Patterson would never know who she paid it to. Please don't tell her. We need our jobs here. It was a terrible thing to do, but no one was hurt. We'll never do anything like it again."

"I won't say anything," I promised her. "I don't think Mrs. Patterson would like to be forced to fire you or have you arrested for extortion. She'll need you now that Deborah is gone. If you don't betray her trust, I won't betray yours."

It was about seven o'clock, daylight savings time, when I got home.

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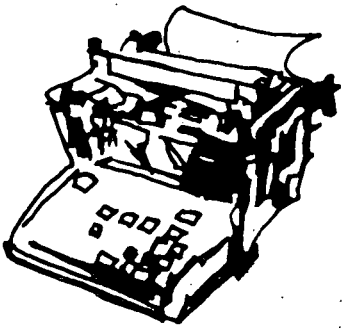
The fog was rolling over Twin Peaks while the sun, as usual, was still shining through the window full force. The neighborhood dogs set up a howl in harmony with an ambulance siren as it pulled into Mission Emergency below. I sat down at my card table and wrote Mrs. Patterson a refund check and put it in an envelope to mail tomorrow. When it comes to paying the rent, stolen typewriters beat missing heiresses every time.



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THE JURY BOX

by Allen J. Hubin

I'm struck by the number of mystery novels written by folks with connections, direct or indirect, to national politics. I think in recent years of Jim Garrison, Ron Nessen, Margaret Truman, John Erlichman, Spiro Agnew, and Pierre Salinger. Possibly the earliest example of this is *The President's Mystery* (1935), inspired by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Now FDR's son, Elliott Roosevelt, joins this list with *Murder and the First Lady* (St. Martin's, $12.95). Eleanor Roosevelt, with restrained encouragement from a President preoccupied with the likelihood of war in Europe, tackles a 1939 murder case in which a winsome English lass seems irretrievably destined to die in the electric chair. Skeptics about her innocence abound, and include J. Edgar Hoover (portrayed as a rather thick-headed publicity hound) and a Scotland Yard inspector. The First Lady must proceed discreetly to preserve the dignity of her office, but proceed she does—among the lowlifes of politics and gambling—to identify an unexpected killer. Enjoyable glimpses of an era and people from one who knows firsthand and could have shared deeper insights.

Jeremiah Healy, a Boston attorney, debuts very strongly with deft plotting and characterization in *Blunt Darts* (Walker, $12.95). John Francis Cuddy lost his job as an insurance investigator when his ethics proved too inelastic for his employer, and he turned to blending unemployment compensation with occasional private eying. The teenage son of a suburban Boston judge disappears, apparently a runaway. His grandmother hires Cuddy, while the judge and his minions (police, court officer, investigative agency) seem determined to divert Cuddy at all costs. How does this all relate to the suicide of the boy's mother a few years earlier?

The latest Police Commissaire Castang novel by Nicolas Freeling, *No Part in Your Death* (Viking, $13.95), finds the author in something of an experimental mood. First with style. The narrative must be read with utmost attention, for at times it seems to be a sort of stream-of-consciousness with connective tissue missing and with words and phrases from at least three languages scattered about. This part of the experiment is not wholly successful. Then with plot. Castang deals with three cases: one while on a trip to Munich; another in France involving a writer friend, his wife, and a rain-swollen river; and the third an apparent ritual suicide in England. This part is more successful: the cases are intriguing, and the reader may only wish for less ambiguity in the resolution of two of them.

In Bill Pronzini's *Nightshades*

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(St. Martin's, $11.95) his nameless private eye is hired to investigate the death of a land developer several hundred miles north of San Francisco. "Nameless" takes his lady friend and his freshly cultivated moustache along to find out if the irascible natives whose wilderness the developer had beady eyes on have taken matters into their own hands. Or if the dead man's partners took action to harvest an insurance policy. None of these folks is particularly edifying and nosing about in their business is sure to be dangerous. One of the better tales in this good series.

A new female private eye, Connie Kale, is well met in W. R. Philbrick's *Slow Dancer* (St. Martin's, $13.95). Connie's discovery that she was not quite good enough for professional golf was devastating, and she returned to Rivermuth, Maine, to practice a different craft. Now an old acquaintance gets herself murdered in sordid circumstances. The dead woman's grandfather, a former Maine governor and still a presence not to be discounted, hires Connie to snoop and thereby to help protect the family name—and his son's candidacy for Congress. With dying this tale is not yet done, and Connie follows the bloody trail to a towering climax.

The Case of the Murdered Mackenzie (Delacorte, $11.95) is the first of E. V. Cunningham's seven novels about Beverly Hills detective Masao Masuto that I've read. I found it an engaging puzzler, a tad untidy about the ending but quite worth the effort. A scientist is killed by his wife. Except, contrary to the testimony of all others, she says the dead man is not her husband—and that she didn't kill him. Someone, somewhere, pushes to have her charged and brought to trial, though the evidence is insufficient. Someone, somewhere, wants the affair quickly forgotten. Masuto rebels against manipulators, pokes about where he's not wanted. Someone, somewhere, decides Masao should be dead, along with, if necessary, all others who know too much.

The back flap of *Cheap Shot* by Jay Cronley (Atheneum, $13.95) bears praise by Donald E. Westlake. This is most appropriate, for *Shot* is very much in the mold of Westlakean criminous lunacy, done to a hilarious fare-thee-well. A chap named Trout and three cohorts decide to become fabulously wealthy by stealing the contents of a museum and ransoming them back. They plan the caper to the finest detail, rehearsing until nothing can go wrong. First, steal a couple of vans. Then neutralize the police precinct to which the museum is wired. What could go astray? Just about everything.

Death of a Minor Poet (Scribners, $12.95) by William Krasner is the fifth case, spread over 35 years, for Detective Captain Sam Birge. Birge is tired, overworked, aging, snappish with his wife. He needs rest—or an uncomplicated murder at most. But a killing among the arty types that live in a dingy apartment building and frequent its ground-floor café—this he doesn't need. Birge's interest here is in the psy-

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chology of the victim, a hanger-on among the painters, a keeper of journals, an aspiring writer, a protector of the innocent. I'm particularly impressed with Krasner's ability to bring people into sharp focus with subtle strokes, and to draw a grim and poignant denouement naturally from his characters. Good work.

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MRS. HORNER'S REVENGE

by PATRICIA MATTHEWS

Where have you been all night, Jack Horner?
And put down that silly plum.
I've told you before not to eat with your hands.
You've got syrup all over your thumb.

You say you've been home, right here in your corner?
Well, we both know that isn't true.
I heard you go out about half past ten,
And I had someone following you.

Yes, I hired young Thomas, the piper's son,
And he's done the same before.
He followed you right down the village road,
And straight to Miss Muffet's door.

You didn't come out until half past one,
It will do you no good to lie.
Of course, you won't do it again, you fool,
I've poisoned your blinking pie!

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Reginald Hill's first novel, A Clubbable Woman, *first published in England in 1970, has just recently been published in this country by Countryman Press. Naming Mr. Hill one of the finest British mystery writers at work today,* Publishers Weekly *called the book "an exemplar of its genre, offering suspense up to the end, a wonderfully credible cast of characters, and a vivid portrait of English small-town life."*

We are delighted that this author's work is beginning to find publishers here (his latest novel, Deadheads, *was published by Macmillan, as will be his next,* Exit Lines*). The following story won a major Veuve Cliquot award for a crime short story in England and sold there to the* Sunday Express. *We hope very much to bring you more of his shorter fiction . . .*

THE WORST CRIME KNOWN TO MAN

by REGINALD HILL

> "A middle-aged man was removed from the Centre Court crowd yesterday for causing a disturbance during a line-call dispute."

On summer evenings when I was young, I used to sit with Mama on the verandah of our bungalow and watch the flamingoes gliding over the tennis court to roost on the distant lake.

This was my favorite time of day and the verandah was my favorite place. It was simply furnished with a low table, a scatter of cane chairs, and an old English farmhouse rocker with its broad seat molded and polished by long use.

This was Father's special chair. At the end of the day, he would fold his great length into it and lean back with a sigh of contentment, and more often than not say, "This was your grandfather's chair, Colley. Did I ever tell you that?",

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"Yes, Father."

"Did I? Then probably I told you what it was my father used to tell me while sitting in this chair."

"Life is a game and you play to the rules, and cheating's the worst crime known to man," I would chant.

"Good boy," he would exclaim, laughing and glancing at Mama, who would smile sweetly, making me smile, too. I always smiled when Mama smiled. She seemed to me then a raving beauty, and as she was certainly the most attractive of the only three white women within five hundred square miles I suppose she seemed so to many others, too. "Boff" Gorton, a young District Officer from a better school than Father, used to tell her so after his third gin-and-tonic, and she would smile and my father would laugh. Boff came round quite a lot, ostensibly to check that all was well (there had already been the first stirrings of the Troubles) and to have a couple of sets on our lush green tennis court. I was too young to wonder how serious Boff's admiration of Mama really was. During one of his visits, when Father had been held up in the bush, I got up in the night for a drink of water and heard a noise of violent rocking on the verandah. When I went to investigate, I discovered Mama relaxing in the rocking chair and Boff, flushed and rather breathless, sitting on the floor. Curiously, Boff's situation struck me as less remarkable than Mama's. This was the first time in my life I had ever known her to occupy the rocker.

Father's attitude to Boff was that of an older and rather patronizingly helpful brother. Only on the tennis court did anything like passion show, and that may have been due to natural competitiveness rather than jealousy. At any rate, their games were gargantuan struggles, with Boff's youth and Father's skill in such balance that the outcome was always in doubt.

The court itself was beautiful, a rectangle of English green it had taken ten years to perfect. It was completely enclosed in a cage of wire mesh, erected more to keep wildlife out than balls in. Human entry was effected through a small, tight-fitting gate, shut at night with a heavy chain and large padlock.

Father and Boff played their last match there one spring afternoon which had all the warmth and richness of the best of English summer evenings. Mama was away superintending the *accouchement* of our nearest female neighbor, who had foolishly delayed her transfer down country overlong. Curiously, Mama's absence seemed to stir things up between the two men more than her presence ever did,

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and Father's invitation to Boff to play tennis came out like a challenge to a duel. Boff tried to lighten matters by saying to me, "Colley, old chum, why don't you come along and be ballboy?"

"Yes, Colley," said Father. "You come along. You can be umpire, too, and see fair play."

"I say," said Boff, flushing. "Do we need an umpire? I mean, neither of us is likely to cheat, are we?"

"Life is a game and you play to the rules, and cheating's the worst crime known to man," I piped up.

"How right you are, Colley," said Father, observing Boff grimly. "You umpire!"

There was no more discussion, but even in the pre-match knockup I recognized a ferocity which both excited and disturbed me. And when the match proper began, it was such a hard-fought struggle that for a long time none of us noticed the arrival of the spectators. Usually only the duty houseboy watched from a respectful distance, waiting to be summoned forward with refreshing drinks, though occasionally some nomadic tribesmen would gaze from the fringes of the bush with courteous puzzlement. But this was different. Suddenly I realized that the court was entirely surrounded. There must have been two hundred of them, all standing quietly enough, but all marked with the symbols of their intent and bearing its instruments—matchets and spears.

"Father!" I choked out.

The two men glanced toward me, then saw what I had seen. For a second no one moved, then with a fearsome roar the natives rushed forward. Boff hurled himself toward the gate in the fence and for a moment I thought he was making a suicidal attempt at flight. But District Officers are trained in other schools than that and next minute I saw he had seized the retaining chain, pulled it round the gate post, and snapped shut the padlock.

The enemy was locked out. At the same time, of course, we were locked in.

If they had been carrying guns, in, out, it would have made no difference. Fortunately, they were not, and the mesh was too close for the broad heads of their throwing spears. Even so, they could soon have hacked a way through the wire had not Boff for the second time revealed the quality of his training. Father, in his eagerness for the fray, had come from the house unarmed, but Boff had brought his revolver and as soon as a group of our invaders began to hack

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at the fence he took careful aim and shot the most enthusiastic of them between the eyes.

They fell back in panic, but only for a moment. When they realized that Boff wasn't following up his attack, they returned to the fence. But no one offered to lead another demolition attempt.

"I've got just five bullets left," murmured Boff. "The only thing holding these chaps back is that they know the first to make a move will certainly die. But eventually not even that will matter."

"Why don't we make a dash for the house?" asked Father. "It's only fifty yards. And once we get to the rifles—"

"For God's sake!" said Boff. "Don't you understand? Outside this fence, we're finished! And please don't talk about rifles. Once one of this lot gets that idea—"

Suddenly there came a great cry from the direction of the bungalow and I thought someone *had* got the idea. But a puff of smoke and a sudden tongue of flame revealed the truth, at the same time better and worse. Worse, because my home was going up in flames; better, because this act of arson would destroy their only source of weaponry and might even attract attention to our plight.

Father, perhaps feeling annoyed at the lead Boff had taken in dealing with the situation, suddenly picked up his racket.

"We might as well do something till help comes," he said. "My service, I believe."

It may have started as a gesture, but very rapidly that match developed into the hard, bitter struggle it had promised to be before the attack. I stood at the net holding the revolver, at first keeping an eye on the enemy outside. But soon my judgment of line-calls and lets was being required so frequently that I had to give my full attention to the game.

But the most curious thing of all was the reaction of the rebels. At first there'd been some jabbering about ways of winkling us out. Then they fell silent—except for one man, some renegade houseboy I presume, who rather self-importantly began to offer a mixture of explanation of, and commentary on, the game, till his voice too died away; and at four-all in the first set I realized they had become as absorbed in the match as the players themselves. It was quite amazing, like watching a highly sunburned Wimbledon crowd. Their heads moved from side to side following the flight of the ball, and at particularly strong or clever shots, they beat their spear-shafts

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against the earth and made approving booming noises deep in their throats.

Father took the first set seven-five and looked as if he might run away with the second. But at one-four, Boff's youth began to tell and suddenly Father was on the defensive. At four-four he seemed to fold up completely, but I guessed that he was merely admitting the inevitable and taking a rest with a view to the climax.

The policy seemed to pay off. Boff won that set six-four, but now he too seemed to have shot his bolt and neither man could gain on ascendancy in the final set. Six-six it went, seven-seven, eight-eight, nine-nine, then into double figures. The light was fading fast.

"Look," said Boff coming up to the net and speaking in a low voice. "Shall we try to keep it going as long as possible? I don't know what these fellows may do when we finish. All right?"

Father didn't answer but returned to the base line to serve. They came hard and straight, four aces. The crowd boomed. I forgot my official neutrality and joined in the applause. Father stood back to receive service.

I don't know. Perhaps he *was* trying to keep the match going. Perhaps he just intended to give away points by lashing out wildly at Boff's far from puny service. But the result was devastating. Three times in a row the ball streaked from his racket quite unplayably, putting up base-line chalk. Love-forty. Three match points. Father settled down, Boff served. Again the flashing return, but this time Boff, driven by resentment or fear, flung himself after it and sent it floating back. Father smashed, Boff retrieved. Father smashed. Boff retrieved again.

"For God's sake!" he pleaded.

Father, at the net, drove the ball deep into the corner and Boff managed to reach this only by flinging himself full length across the grass. But what a shot he produced! A perfect lob, drifting over Father's head and making for the extreme backhand corner.

Father turned with a speed I had not believed him capable of and went in pursuit. There was topspin on the ball. Once it bounced, it would be away beyond mortal reach. The situation looked hopeless.

But Father had no intention of letting it bounce. I drew in my breath as I saw he was going to attempt that most difficult of shots, a reverse backhand volley on the run. I swear the spectating natives drew in their breath, too.

Father stretched—but it wasn't enough. He leapt. He connected

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It was superb. The ball floated toward Boff who still lay prostrate on the base line, and bounced gently a couple of feet from his face.

"Out!" he called desperately.

Father's roar of triumph turned to a howl of incredulity.

"Out?" he demanded. "*Out?*" He turned to me and flung his arms wide in appeal.

Boff called to me. "Please, Colley. It *was* out, wasn't it? It *was!*" He spoke with all the authority of a District Officer. But I was the umpire and I knew that in this matter my powers exceeded his. I shook my head.

"In!" I called. "Game, set and match to—"

With a cry of triumph, Father jumped over the net. And at the same moment a big black fellow with a face painted like a Halloween lantern twisted his spear butt in the chain till it snapped and the howling mob poured in.

They were only inside the fence for about ten seconds before the first Land Rover full of troops arrived. But in that time they managed to carve the recumbent Boff into several pieces. Father, on his feet and wielding his racket like a cavalry saber, managed to get away with a few unpleasant wounds while I—perhaps because I still held the revolver, though I was too petrified to use it—escaped without threat, let alone violence.

On her return, Mama was naturally upset. I would have thought the survival of her husband and only son would have compensated for the loss of the house, but the more this was urged the greater waxed her grief. Later, when I told the story of the match, describing with the detail which befits a noble death how Boff had so heroically attempted to keep the final game going, she had a relapse. When she recovered, things changed. I don't think I ever saw her smile again at Father's jokes.

Not that there were many more to smile at. One of Father's wounds turned septic and he had to have his right arm amputated just above the elbow. He tried to learn to play left-handed thereafter, but it never amounted to more than pat-ball, and within a twelvemonth only the metal supports rising from the luxuriant undergrowth showed where the tennis court had been.

Soon after that I was sent back to the old country for schooling, and midway through my first term the Head sent for me to tell me there'd been a tragic accident. Father had been cleaning a gun and it had gone off. Or perhaps my mother had been cleaning the gun.

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Or perhaps, as they both died, they'd both been cleaning guns. I never discovered any details. Out there in the old days, they still knew how to draw a decent veil over such things.

I was deeply grieved, of course, but school's a good place for forgetting, and I never went back. Sending me to England had been their last known wish for my future. I did not feel able to go against it, not even when I was old enough to have some freedom of choice. And I have been happy enough here with my English job, English marriage, English health. I dig my little patch of garden, read political biographies, play a bit of golf.

But no tennis. I never got interested at school somehow, and I don't suppose I would ever have bothered with tennis again if my managing director hadn't offered me a spare Centre Court ticket. Well, I had to be in town anyway and it seemed silly to miss the chance of visiting Wimbledon.

I was enjoying it thoroughly, too—enjoying the crowd and the place and the game, here, now, with never a thought for the old days—till the Australian played that deep cross-court lob which sent the short-tempered American sprawling.

Then suddenly I saw it all again.

The white ball drifting through the richly scented, darkling air.

The outstretched figure on the base line.

The pleading, despairing look on Boff's face as he watches the ball bounce out of his reach.

And with it his youth and his hopes and his life.

I saw the same anguish on the American's face today, heard the same accusing disbelief in his voice.

Of course, it wasn't his life and hopes and youth that were at stake. But, as Father used to say, life is a game, and you play to the rules, and cheating's the worst crime known to man.

And the American and Boff did have one thing in common.

Both balls were a good six inches out.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Antonia Nielsen story by

CAROL CLEMEAU

This is the second story about Professor Antonia Nielsen in EQMM, the first being "Curses" in the January 1983 issue. The professor made her first appearance in print in The Ariadne Clue, *which won Scribners' first First Crime Novel Award in 1982 as well as the John Creasey Award (in England) for best first novel.*

Antonia's Afghan hound Nike sensed that things were still not exactly normal, but getting better. After the fiasco of the day before yesterday, they could hardly get worse. The person was still not as playful as usual. She still refused to rub ears or throw a stick. She still would not talk to one in a civilized fashion. No doubt about it, the human tendency to bear a grudge was one of the species' least attractive characteristics . . .

DEAD WOOD

by CAROL CLEMEAU

"Damn it, Antonia, of course I was *expecting* it. I expect death and taxes, too. When they finally get around to taking away your money, your life, or your career, the shock isn't noticeably less because you were *expecting* it."

Professor Antonia Nielsen glanced again at the letter the young man had flung onto her desk. When he burst into her office, she had been peacefully sipping her eleven o'clock coffee and dozing over an article in a back issue of the faculty newsletter. The article (which described the latest in the University's seemingly endless parade of research institutes, something called the Clinical Research Center for Chemosensory Disorders) was less than enthralling and Paul Kendall was obviously in considerable distress. So it was without

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regret that Antonia had tossed the newsletter back into the disreputable carton that served as her "clipping file" and turned her attention to Paul's letter.

The bureaucratic prose smiled blandly up at her: "It is with regret that the Chancellor and Board of Trustees of this University find themselves unable to renew your contract beyond the stipulated—"

As if reading over her shoulder, Paul burst out again, "Why don't they just say 'You're fired' and get it over with?" The pale young English instructor in the visitor's chair sounded discouraged as well as bitter.

Once more Antonia tried to find something soothing to say. "It really isn't firing, Paul. No one's dissatisfied with you or your work, you know that. But your job is a three-year appointment, a fill-in for various people on temporary leaves of absence. As a permanent position, it simply doesn't exist, that's all." Immediately she realized she'd said the wrong thing again.

"Oh, the job exists all right, Antonia. But unhappily, so does Harley Wood. And so does the glorious institution of academic tenure, watchdog of our freedoms. Freedom to goldbrick, freedom to drink, freedom to—"

"Paul." Antonia cut him short, not in defense of the glorious institution but of his own dignity. Intellectually, Paul Kendall was mature beyond his years. He had once asked Antonia to read the manuscript of his book on Christopher Marlowe, checking the Latin quotes and the references to classical literature, and she had been impressed and delighted with the work. The breadth of perspective, the independence of thought and judgment she saw in it were qualities rarely found in a doctoral dissertation, however extensively revised and expanded for publication.

In other ways, though, Paul was still very young—prone, for example, to exaggerated swings of mood that sometimes led him to say and do things he would later regret.

"There's not a thing you or I can do about Harley Wood," she said.

"I could kill him," Paul said abruptly. He seemed to be looking inward, watching a drama play itself out somewhere behind his forehead. "I *could* kill him, you know? People do it every day. They do it for one-tenth the motive I've got. People kill their wives, their bosses, their friends for a sharp word or an overcooked dinner. And I'm talking about my *future!* Which at the moment is being occupied by a gin-soaked, lecherous incompetent, who probably hasn't read

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let alone published a book in thirty years and who treats his students like unpaid errand boys!"

"Vodka," said Antonia.

"What?" Paul looked startled.

"Not *gin*-soaked. His drink is vodka. Lots and lots and lots of it."

This time it worked. She had finally interrupted the cycle of rage and self-pity and given the young man's sense of proportion a chance to reassert itself. He smiled wanly.

"Ah, yes," he said. "How could I forget? 'Colorless, odorless, non-flammable—the only *truly* undetectable poison known to science.' I remember the first time I heard him make that stupid joke. It must have been less than two years ago when I first came here. It seems more like fifty, I've heard it so often since."

They joked about Harley Wood's notoriously juvenile sense of humor for a few minutes, then returned to the more serious question of Paul's professional future. He had one more year of guaranteed employment at the University, but after that his prospects were as grim as those of thousands of other young humanities Ph.D.s. But talking it out seemed to steady him a little and in the end he even conceded that it wasn't, after all, Harley Wood's fault that he would soon be out of a job.

When he rose to leave Antonia's office and return to his own, apologizing for having wasted a piece of her morning, his eye fell on the corner beside the door which was normally occupied by her big grey Afghan hound, Nike. Today it contained only the battered grocery carton overflowing with newspaper and magazine clippings.

"Where's Nike?" he asked. "I thought it seemed empty in here, but I was so wrapped up in my own woes I didn't realize what was missing. Is she sick or something?"

"Nike," said Antonia, "is in disgrace. I suppose our witty colleague Wood would say she's in the doghouse, though in this case it's only a figurative one, unfortunately."

"What's the poor girl done? I've always thought she was the best behaved dog I ever knew, and I'm no great animal-lover."

"All I can say," Antonia explained darkly, "is thank heaven my bathroom has a good ventilating fan."

That afternoon, a chastened Nike took her person for a walk, the first proper walk they'd had in three days. She sensed that things were still not exactly normal, but getting better. After the fiasco of the day before yesterday, they could hardly get worse. The person

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was still not as playful as usual. She still refused to rub ears or throw a stick. She still would not talk to one in a civilized fashion. No doubt about it, the human tendency to bear a grudge was one of the species' least attractive characteristics.

But Antonia's thoughts were not on Nike, as it happened. She was thinking about Harley Wood.

Wood was the man for whom the term "deadwood" was invented, though faculty puns on this had long since played themselves out. Paul's claim that Wood hadn't read a book in thirty years was probably a slight exaggeration, but it *was* a fact that he hadn't written one. Nor had he published an article, his dissertation, or even a book review. Students who inquired about his work were treated to a highly colored account of ongoing research that (if they bothered to investigate more closely) turned out to relate to his doctoral dissertation, which had been nearing publication for twenty-nine years.

Not that Harley Wood was inactive. Far from it. Vigorous indeed were his attentions to the more naive segments of the female undergraduate population, tireless his researches into the as yet unperfected formula for the ultimate vodka martini, relentless his pursuit of ever more novel and ingenious ploys for avoiding committee assignments, advisory chores, and the drudgery of grading.

All of which might have been forgiven him if only he had been a teacher.

Over the years, however, Wood's pronouncements on the subject of undergraduates, male and female, had left no doubt in anyone's mind as to his view of the student-teacher relationship. The "boys" were for washing one's car and weeding one's roses. The "girls" were—well, everyone knows what girls are for. Occasionally one of the very brightest of either sex might be honored with a research assignment in connection with the ever-nearing publication of Wood's dissertation.

But of all the outrages he perpetrated against his colleagues' sensibilities and convictions the worst was that large numbers of students were actually taken in by him. Year after year, other faculty members were subjected to endless encomia of Professor Wood's sense of humor, his accessibility to students, his genius for "making all that old stuff come, you know, *alive*."

In fact, his sense of humor was sophomoric, his accessibility in direct proportion to his distaste for his professional responsibilities, his dramatic sense that of a fifth-rate mind for whom the past is essentially dead and can only be revived by the most artificial of

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means. But this is the sort of thing professional ethics forbid one to say about one's colleagues, at least in the presence of students.

Antonia, who had often ground her teeth in silence while yet another starry-eyed freshman chirped the praises of the egregious Wood, realized she was beginning to see Paul Kendall's point of view all too clearly. It *was* maddening, even to one whose job was not at stake, that such a fraud should occupy a position so desperately needed by worthier people.

She wrenched herself away from these unprofitable thoughts at the approach of another old friend from the English Department, Barry Greenfield. Barry's conversational style was informal to say the least of it.

"Hey, Antonia," he said cheerfully, "I don't know if you'd noticed, but your dog seems to be decomposing."

"Not her," said Antonia, "but the thing she rolled in was. You're not to speak to her, she's in disgrace."

"The temptation to do anything at all with her is, at the moment, highly resistible," Barry retorted. "Really, Antonia, the consequences for your social life—not to mention hers—could be devastating."

"Barry," Antonia cut him short, "have you heard about Paul Kendall?"

"Ah, yes," said Barry, making the shift from horseplay to seriousness with an agility the uninitiated might have found disconcerting. "Nothing else they could do, I suppose, but disgusting nonetheless. Some of us in the department are getting up a sort of protest document. It won't have the slightest practical effect, of course, but it relieves our feelings a bit. Want me to add your name to it?"

"Why not?" said Antonia. "I haven't made a futile gesture in ages."

"Right. Well, take care, old girl—and do something about that dog, won't you?"

"Like what?" she said to Nike when Barry was gone. "Mail you somewhere? Bury you in the back yard?" Nike, taking the words for a long-overdue gesture of reconciliation, began to gambol delightedly and rushed off in search of a suitable throwing-stick.

Naturally this was the afternoon Antonia encountered more acquaintances in one forty-five-minute walk than she normally did in a week. Gatineau of French, Godfrey of Physics, several students, Miss Lilly of the University Museum—all of them had to be strolling the very same cross-campus paths at the very same moment as

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Antonia and her temporarily unsavory companion. And all of them made more or less caustic observations concerning the dog's social acceptability.

The last and worst of them was Jordan of Chemistry. He used the predictable remark about Nike as preamble to a subject with which he was obsessed these days, his work at the new chemosensory-disorders center. Antonia made the mistake of mentioning that she had read about the institute. Thus encouraged, Jordan launched enthusiastically upon an introduction to his own research on the olfactory nerve and its response to various revolting substances.

Three minutes into his subject, Jordan halted in mid-sentence and stared for a moment over Antonia's shoulder. Muttering something that sounded like "*No* getting away from that man?" he bid her a hasty goodbye and turned to go.

Antonia looked back in the direction from which she had come and saw someone approaching; presumably the person who had inspired Jordan's premature departure. Turning again to him, she said, "Oh, come on, Jerry. Count yourself lucky you don't have to share an office building with him. You're safely off on the other side of campus in the Science Complex, you can afford to be civil to him *once* in a—"

But Jordan had fled, leaving Antonia to face Harley Wood alone.

"Afternoon, Harley," she said as dismissively as possible without actually sounding rude.

"Ah, the lovely Professor Nielsen." His voice, as usual, fairly dripped condescension. He appeared to assume that any woman would naturally want the maximum amount of fuss made over so astounding an achievement as becoming a college professor, not to mention a colleague of his. "And that splendid dog of yours—what's his name, Pericles?"

"*Her* name is Nike."

"Of course, of course. Goddess of victory, wasn't she? Magnificent animal." He patted the magnificent animal absently and sauntered off in the direction of the Administration Building.

"Come on, Splendid," said Antonia, "let's get out of here. Between your aura and his, I feel distinctly queasy."

There was a faculty party that night, which Antonia attended reluctantly. Never much of a party person at the best of times, she particularly dreaded the spectacle of Paul Kendall bravely facing up to the condolences and indignations of his colleagues. Even more

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depressing was the probability that Harley Wood would also be there, presumably drunk as he usually was after five P.M. Would he have the effrontery to offer Paul *his* condolences, too? Antonia groped for a plausible excuse to desert the festivities not long after she arrived, but she still hadn't come up with anything very convincing when she reached the Faculty Club at nine. She told herself it had been an unworthy impulse anyway. Cowardly not to stay and swell the number of those demonstrating their solidarity with their unfortunate colleague.

When she arrived, however, the unfortunate colleague seemed to be doing pretty well for himself. He was being sympathized with, advised as to his best "options" and "strategies," and assured that his colleagues felt guilty as hell having jobs when he didn't. His reaction to all this was one that Antonia described to herself, perhaps a little uncharitably, as wallowing.

Paul's conversations, which she was too far away to hear except in snatches, were punctuated by broad gestures with a very large highball held in his right hand. He looked as if the drink was by no means the first of the evening. Flushed and hectic-looking, his voice whenever it carried to her a little strident, Paul looked to be well on his way to becoming either obnoxious or maudlin before the party ended.

In the opposite corner of the room, Harley Wood was holding forth. For once he was unaccompanied by any of the downy coeds he usually brought to these functions. But on the other hand, he appeared to be even more drunk than he usually was.

Perhaps to someone standing at a greater emotional distance from the two of them, thought Antonia, the scene might have its intriguing aspects. If you could overlook the heartache that Paul's performance undoubtedly hid—and for all she knew Harley Wood might have obscure intimations of his own fraudulence, and the grace to suffer for it—it was possible to imagine them as two exotic animals acting out some elaborate domination-submission ritual, incomprehensible and grotesque though it may look to any creature not of their own species, the ritual nevertheless determining their individual destinies, their social if not their physical life or death.

Antonia managed to fill the first hour or so with eating, drinking, and talking to people other than Harley Wood and Paul Kendall. She was already beginning to think about exchanging a few words with Paul, nodding civilly to Wood, and departing, when the storm broke.

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Or, less metaphorically, Harley Wood broke.

A small open space had developed around him, space previously occupied by a succession of colleagues who felt they ought for appearances' sake to speak to him before moving on to more congenial company. But by now most of those who felt such an obligation had already fulfilled it and Harley Wood was left alone. And drunk. And angry.

"*Bloody shame*," he snarled suddenly. "That's what all you sanctimonious bastards are thinking. Isn't it a *bloody shame* there's no room for that nice Mr. Kendall in the—"

Like well drilled bouncers in a comedy turn, three men surrounded him and tried to divert him to more neutral topics. But Wood was not to be diverted. With the physical deftness that a certain stage of intoxication seems to promote, he sidestepped his would-be restrainers and started toward Paul Kendall. Antonia, who happened to be standing midway between the two of them at the moment, stepped forward and tried to take Wood's arm. Irritably, he brushed her away.

Thus it happened that Harley Wood and Paul Kendall came face to face before anyone could prevent it.

Paul behaved very well, Antonia thought afterward. He was near one end of the buffet table, and when he saw Wood coming toward him he set his drink down on it almost as if he expected to need both hands free. "Good evening, Professor Wood," he said.

"'Sbeen quite a love feast for you tonight, hasn't it, my boy? All this sympathizing and regretting and tut-tutting over your unfortunate situation. Most gratifying, I have no doubt, most grat-*ick*-fying."

"Everyone's been very—"

"Of course," Wood continued, ignoring him, "the coro-, corollary to all that isn't quite so gratifying to *me*. Other side of that coin is, what a goddam shame that ol' Harley doesn't jus'—doesn't jus'—oh, what the hell." And, anticlimactically, he gulped the half martini that remained in the glass, set the glass on the table beside Paul's, and left the room.

Antonia, being nearest, reached Paul before any of the others. "Oh," she said helplessly, "what a rotten thing. He's really put himself beyond the pale this time."

"It's all right, Antonia." Paul attempted a smile. "From a purely selfish point of view, I'm just as glad it was Wood who made an ass

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of himself in public. It could easily have been me. This morning it *was* me, you may recall."

And ten minutes later she *was* recalling it when Paul left the party, having given Harley Wood enough of a head start to minimize the chances of their running into each other on the way home. They lived on the same street, though several blocks apart, and this wasn't the first time Paul had taken precautions against finding himself walking home with Wood.

Antonia watched him leave, remembering the conversation they had had that morning in her office—the conversation in the course of which he had "made an ass of himself," as he put it, by threatening to kill Harley Wood.

Antonia had no class the next morning until eleven o'clock. She reached her office at ten-thirty and was fumbling the key into the lock when Barry Greenfield appeared in the corridor beside her. His face was grim.

He took the armload of books she was carrying so that she could make better headway with the lock, then followed her into the office and sank uninvited into the chrome-and-plastic visitor's chair.

"Antonia," he said without preliminaries, "you're a pal of Paul Kendall's, right?"

For a second she wondered if this was the opening gambit in one of the comedy routines that often passed for conversation with Barry. Another look at his face, however, convinced her otherwise.

"We're friends, yes," she said.

"The cops are swarming around upstairs in our department. They'll be getting to him before long, and—well, he wants to talk to you."

"Barry, what on earth—?"

"Harley Wood is dead, Antonia. Poisoned, from what I can gather. When he didn't show up for an eight o'clock this morning, they—"

She scarcely heard the rest of Barry's résumé of the few known facts and the many rumors and speculations. It was all so *pat*, she thought with irrational irritability. Paul hates Wood, Paul threatens to kill Wood, Paul follows Wood home from a party, Wood is dead next morning. Ergo, Q.E.D.—and likewise preposterous.

"I get the impression he's actually *scared*," Barry was saying.

"Look, Barry," she said, "could you do me one more favor? I have a class in ten minutes. Would you put a note on the board in room 313 saying I can't meet them today? I'm going up to talk to Paul."

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"Sure thing. Tell him anything I can do and all that."

She found Paul in his office, two floors up from hers, at the far end of the corridor. Barry's "swarming" police turned out to consist of two mild-looking men in business suits who were talking with an assistant professor at the opposite end of the hall from Paul's office.

Paul smiled wanly as Antonia entered but didn't rise from his chair.

"Will you please tell me what's going on around here?" she demanded. "Barry Greenfield says Harley Wood is dead and the police are investigating and you want to talk to me."

"Antonia." He sounded exhausted. "There isn't much time, they'll be here any minute—"

"Paul, those detectives, if that's who you're talking about, are way down at the other end of the—"

"Yes, but I have a lot to say—and do—before they get here. I have to ask you a favor, for starters. I have to ask you not to mention what I said to you yesterday morning. About killing Harley. It was true in a sense: for a few seconds I had this terrifying sense that I was actually capable of such a thing. But it passed, Antonia, I swear to you it was nothing but a passing impulse. It never returned. I never had such a thought before or since. It meant nothing. Surely you understand that."

"I do understand, yes. But why should it matter so much, Paul? Surely it's only on television that innocent people are arrested for a few wild words like that? And why should the police treat this as anything but an accident, anyway? Isn't this just a routine investigation?"

"It may be at the moment. But I'm afraid it won't be after I tell them what I suppose I'll have to. Which is—as far as they'll be able to tell, Antonia, I was the last person to see Harley Wood alive."

"But that's impossible! We all saw him leave the party last night. Something like two hundred people know he left at least ten minutes before you did."

"But I saw him again after that. In spite of my efforts to avoid him, I caught up with him a couple of blocks this side of his house. He was literally staggering, Antonia. I've never seen him or anyone else that drunk who was still conscious. He kept wandering into the street, and a couple of times he almost fell down. It was revolting, but I couldn't just leave him like that. He was begging to get run down by a car the rate he was going. So I helped him home."

"That certainly doesn't make you his murderer!"

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"No, wait, there's more. Nobody around here really knows for certain how he died, but apparently he was poisoned. And if it's the poison I think it was—my fingerprints are on the bottle, Antonia. I don't know whether the cops have found them yet, but they're there all right."

"But what in heaven's name were you doing in Harley Wood's medicine cabinet?"

"Not his medicine cabinet, his kitchen cupboard. What really happened was that I manhandled him through the back door into the kitchen and he refused to go any farther until I fixed him a nightcap. He said he'd been having trouble sleeping lately. I pointed out that he'd already had the equivalent of half a dozen nightcaps, but he kept babbling 'hair of the dog, hair of the dog.' All I wanted was to get out of there and get to bed myself, so I asked him where the vodka was and he said next to the sink.

"There were cupboards on both sides of the sink, and I guessed wrong the first time. I looked in the right-hand cupboard and one of the bottles there looked like a pint of vodka, but when I reached it down it had a piece of masking tape stuck over the vodka label with 'Wood Alcohol' written on it. And the other bottles on that shelf were various kinds of cleaning products.

"The liquor, of course, was to the *left* of the sink. The vodka bottle was nearly empty—only enough left for one martini—so I fixed one for him, threw the bottle into the trash, and went home."

"And that's all?"

"As far as my personal knowledge goes, yes. Obviously, sometime later he must have taken the wood alcohol down again, drunk most of it, and died. Don't ask me how or why because I haven't a clue."

"But surely no one in his senses, no matter how drunk, would chug down a whole pint of anything so vile-tasting."

"Presumably that's why the police aren't treating this as a simple domestic accident. They can't believe there wasn't some kind of coercion involved. I can't believe it, either, for that matter. Only *I* happen to know I wasn't the one who did the coercing." Paul sounded weary. "You know what I keep thinking, Antonia? I keep thinking, And I thought my job prospects were bad *yesterday!*"

Neither of them laughed.

As she left, Antonia passed the two detectives working their way methodically down the corridor toward Paul's office, but still half a dozen doors away from him. With the small part of her mind not preoccupied with Paul's dilemma, she wondered how long it would

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be before he would have to tell them what he had told her, and what they would make of it.

Back in her own office, Antonia sat at her desk and stared morosely at the rectangle of folded blanket by the door, not really seeing it but wondering idly whether it would be safe to recall Nike from exile the following day. She was trying to keep her mind off Harley Wood by thinking about the dog, but it wasn't working very well. The two ideas kept free-associating despite her efforts to keep them separate.

"Hair of the dog," Harley had said. "Magnificent animal," he'd said. Nobody else said she was magnificent.

She turned away from Nike's blanket and its chain of associations, and let her eye rest on the battered grocery carton next to it. This wasn't a particularly cheering sight, either, because it reminded her she had been promising herself to clean it out for the past six months.

It was a sort of all-purpose clipping file, a temporary dumping ground for travel articles, recipes, cartoons, book reviews—anything of a non-professional nature that demanded to be preserved when the rest of the newspaper was thrown out. It was a silly habit, she often told herself, because most of the stuff eventually got thrown out anyway. The box was bulging and unsightly and a reproach.

But it might also, she suddenly realized, hold the key to the mystery of Harley Wood's death!

Documented intuitions, she told herself excitedly. Hunches with footnotes. That's all scholarship is, in essence. She scooped the top layers of dusty newsprint from the clipping file, found the item she wanted from between a recipe for cassoulet and an article on backpacking in Macedonia, and scanned it rapidly while she picked up the phone and asked the operator to put her through to Jerry Jordan in Chemistry.

"Jerry? Antonia Nielsen here. Look, I need to talk to the head of that new clinic and research center of yours that was written up in the paper a few weeks ago. The one that's working on chemosensory disorders—"

She talked for some time to several people, all of whom confirmed her hypothesis. That was the easy part.

It was when she tried to phone Paul Kendall that the trouble began. The English Department secretary sounded as if she was on the brink of hysteria.

"Professor Nielsen, he isn't *here!* He's gone, he's disappeared. The

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police are simply *frantic*. Well, I mean we're *all* frantic. Those detectives seem to think Professor Kendall is some kind of *murderer*."

Antonia hung up and put her thinking cap back on.

She found him several hours later in a small French restaurant they had once been to, hunched over a bottle of wine and a plate of escargots. He glanced morosely up at her and returned to his wine glass with a shrug.

"Look, Paul," Antonia said, "before you glide gently out of sight beneath the table—look at this." She laid a slip of paper in front of him.

" 'Jerry Jordan, X2514,' " he read. " 'Dr. Hildebrand Weisman, Director CRCCD, X2733—' What the hell is this, Antonia, extracts from your little black book or something?"

"This is your reprieve, O condemned one," said Antonia. She pulled the bottle away from him toward her side of the table and sat down in front of it. Appropriating an unused water glass, she poured herself a generous dollop of Paul's wine. "Thirsty work, dashing about delivering reprieves," she said, sipping appreciatively. It was a very expensive wine. "Everyone's always in such a tearing *hurry* about them, for some reason."

"Antonia, what the devil is this all about? Who are these people, and why am I supposed to be interested in their phone numbers?"

"You're to take these names to the police, who are probably scouring the city for you by now. You didn't do yourself any favors by running away like this, you know. Anyway, tell them to talk to the people on this list."

"But why? Who are they? Jordan's in Chemistry, isn't he? Who are the others?"

"They're all associated in one way or another with the new Clinical Research Center for Chemosensory Disorders, and they've all been involved with Harley Wood's case for the last several months. What they'll tell the police is that Harley was suffering from the most severe chemosensory dysfunction any of them has ever observed."

"I'm so happy for them." Paul grabbed at the wine bottle and poured himself a drink. "But what the hell is a chemosensory dysfunction and why should I care? Harley's health problems, one would think, are very much a thing of the past."

"True, but they also happen to explain how and why he died and will thereby get you off the hook."

For the first time Paul looked seriously interested.

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"Harley Wood had been going to the Center for months, complaining of a virtually total loss of his senses of smell and taste. They were interested in his case because it was unusually severe, but so far they hadn't been able to identify either its cause or a cure. They tell me that's not unusual with chemosensory disorders—they're still pretty mysterious. They can be caused by something as serious as a brain tumor or as trivial as flu. In fact, one of the reasons for that outburst of Harley's last night may have been that most of the trivial causes had been eliminated. They were about to start investigating the possibility that he had a brain tumor, and I expect he was feeling pretty nervy at the prospect."

"And his condition was so severe that he was actually capable of knocking back most of that bottle of wood alcohol before he noticed anything was wrong?"

"I'm afraid so, yes."

"So no coercion was required, from me or anyone else." Paul's tone wavered between relief and skepticism.

"Exactly. And if you go back and explain all this to the police and tell them to talk to the people on this list, they'll confirm everything I've said."

"But how did you find out about this? A few hours ago you were as much in the dark as I was."

"It was after I talked to you. I was worried about you, and I was sitting in my office staring at my clipping file and thinking I really ought to clean it out. That was when the penny dropped. I remembered reading about this new institute of ours that deals with taste-smell disorders. In fact, the article was still lying right where I had tossed it near the top of the pile in the box.

"I also remembered that Harley was the only person Nike and I met on our walk yesterday who didn't make some wisecrack about the way she smelled. In fact, he called her a splendid specimen or something. So I asked myself, what if he wasn't just being polite? What if he really couldn't smell Nike? And if he couldn't smell *her*—

"After that, it was just a question of calling the Center and confirming that Harley did indeed have this problem. They were eager to entertain me with endless stories of gruesome accidents they have known to befall sufferers from chemosensory disorders, like the man who set himself afire by lighting a cigarette near an open gasoline can he couldn't smell. —Pass the damn wine, will you?"

There was a silence while Antonia sipped her wine and the condemned man practiced breathing freely again. Then he said, "Pro-

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fessor Nielsen, I would like you to do me the honor of dining with me. I would further suggest that you take advantage of this offer, because later this evening I expect to be engaged with the police and hence unavailable, and later this year I expect to be unemployed and hence insolvent. In short, it's now or never."

Antonia chose now. She also contributed a second bottle of the very expensive wine, with which they toasted all the people in Paul's "reprieve," first collectively and then individually—the Classics Department and the English Department, including their secretaries, and the two mild-looking detectives.

When they ran out of people, they toasted Nike, without whose help Paul would have found it a lot harder to convince the world he had played no part whatever in relieving the University faculty of its deadwood.

DETECTIVERSE

ALL WASHED UP

by MARK GRENIER

A notorious thief known as Dean
Was at home in his bathtub, serene.
When the lawmen burst in,
He remarked with a grin,
"You'll find nothing on me, boys—I'm clean."

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

The front-door buzzer sounded. In the other room, a newspaper was flung aside, Ford Hagen's voice made noises of discontent, his slippers scuffed across the parquet floor.

The above is the eighth paragraph of the story you are about to read. The last *eight paragraphs of the story are as deft and moving an ending as we've read in a long time. We recommend them to anyone who wants to know how to evoke a dramatic scene. But we trust you, in the tradition of all honorable mystery readers, not to jump ahead—especially since its effectiveness depends entirely on all that happens before . . .*

DEAD LIKE DOGS

by WILLIAM BANKIER

After a couple of nights bedding down in Hagen's semi-basement in South London, Allan Piper had become accustomed to the big Alsatian, Gringo, sleeping outside the blanket with his jaw resting on Piper's ankle.

Not yet ready to close his eyes, Piper had rummaged on a shelf for something to read, had discovered a Montreal Forum hockey program from a couple of years ago. He was leafing through the pages, staring at action photographs of players who made the game look easy. Piper knew how difficult it could be; he was reduced to trying out for the Streatham Strollers, not even the best team in England.

Turning another page, Piper came to the photograph of goaltender Michel Larocque. Across the page in scrawled handwriting was the pathetic statement: "I have to do it—I'm not as good as you."

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Ford Hagen must have scribbled this confession. But so what? Not many goalies could kick out the puck as consistently as Larocque.

Piper made an encouraging noise. "Hey, boy," he whispered, not wanting to attract Hagen and Anna from the front room because he had heard enough about how most things in his host's life had turned to rat spit. Maybe after all he would turn down his friend's invitation to play in England. The game wasn't much fun any more. Maybe he was ready to go back to Baytown.

Responding to Piper's signal, the dog raised his head—a fine grey muzzle, honest eyes. The Alsatian looked at him with such decency, Piper felt the anxiety draining out of him. Dogs had the gift, they lived in a straight line. Judging every moment on its merits, they did not bear grudges or seek revenge. So close to man and yet better than man, wise dependable Gringo deserved to inherit the earth.

Voices murmured down the hall. Ford and Anna were deciding whether or not to watch the late film. Gringo closed his eyes and lowered his head. Cool air filtered in through the mock orange outside the open window.

There were footsteps scraping on the paved area in front of the garage. Somebody came down the concrete steps, slowly. Piper held his breath and listened. Gringo's head came up again.

The front-door buzzer sounded. In the other room, a newspaper was flung aside, Ford Hagen's voice made noises of discontent, his slippers scuffed across the parquet floor.

When he opened the door, things happened quickly. The visitor must have bullied his way inside because Hagen began to complain. Then there was a popping noise—once, twice—and Hagen said no more. Anna screamed until the popping silenced her. With ferocity rumbling in his throat, Gringo had sprung from the bed at first sound of forced entry and now he was in the front room, but the gun—it must have been a silenced gun—popped again and Gringo yelped for the last time.

Piper acted without thinking. As the dog ran from the room, he switched off his light. Now he lay in darkness, both hands covering his face. Don't come in here, he said to himself, and then, to make it more effective, he formed the words with his lips—"God, please don't let him come in here."

The intruder had done most of what he had come to do. But he wasn't finished yet. As Piper listened, he heard slow movements, then a hissing noise, a pause—the hiss again. The sound reminded

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him of something. It was his father in the garden back home with an aerosol can of insecticide, putting paid to green fly.

The intruder left the apartment, closing the door carefully behind him. Footsteps climbed the outside stairs two at a time. Silence. Piper began to tremble, to feel ashamed. Ford Hagen had taken him into his home, had fed him and advised him. Yet when danger erupted, Piper's only thought was to save himself.

But what could he have done against an armed man? The thought occurred that his friends might be alive, so he hurried down the dark corridor into the front room. The bullet hole in Anna Hagen's head and the pool of blood on the carpet told him she was dead.

But Ford made a sound in his throat. Piper went to him and knelt down. His friend stared up at him with glazed eyes. The wound was in his chest. "What did you say?" Piper asked.

"Said slow," the dying man whispered.

"I know. I was afraid. I'm sorry, Fordie, I didn't see what I could do." But Hagen sighed, closed his eyes, was gone.

Piper, kneeling, looked around the room and saw the normality of it. With the sound turned off, the television screen showed him the titles of the late movie, *The Asphalt Jungle*. Piper was filled with childish protest—he wanted everything to be all right so he could sit and see pathetic old Doc feeding money into the jukebox, watching the young girl dance while all the time the police were closing in on the roadhouse.

No, not everything was normal. He saw the markings on the mirror that had not been there before—a swastika and the letters NF. That explained the hissing sound, an aerosol can of paint.

Gringo summoned him with a whimper. He went to the dog and saw the bloody wound in its stomach. The animal didn't know what had happened to him, or why. He was in pain and he wanted his friend Piper to help him.

The memory came back in images clearer than the grey movements on the television screen. Piper and the other kids had stopped playing on a summer morning to watch Nelson Flanagan, who lived in the big house at the end of the lane, bring out his collie dog Prince to put him down. The dog was old and sick, hardly able to walk. Nelson put him in a box and closed the lid, hooked up a length of hose to his car exhaust, fed the other end through a hole cut in the box. He switched on the engine and ran it for a while. Then he said, "Prince has gone to sleep."

Nelson Flanagan was always doing memorable things. Once he

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made a bow out of ironwood and braided cobbler's thread and shot an arrow straight up into the sky, so high it never came down.

First things first. Piper pulled out some clothes, then looked around for a box. He found one in a cupboard, a large carton full of spare bedding. He emptied it, brought it to the front room, lifted Gringo as carefully as possible, and slipped him inside. The dog moaned but looked at him encouragingly.

Hagen's car keys were on a shelf by the front door. Piper put them in his pocket, then lugged the box up the outside stairs and set it down beside the garage door. The hose he found in the garage was too narrow to go over the exhaust pipe but he made it fit by winding it around with masking tape. The other end he thrust through a hole he made in the side of the box.

"Okay, boy," he said brightly, as if they were going for a walk, "soon over!" As he closed the cardboard flaps, he saw liquid eyes looking up at him with approval.

Piper switched on the engine and left it running as he went inside to telephone the police.

The police officers had taken photographs, dusted for prints, and carried away the bodies, including that of the dog. The inspector had been casting glances at Piper since his admission that he had taken time to put Gringo to sleep before dialing 999. "We might have had a chance of catching him."

"How? He was up the stairs and gone. After I dialed, it took you twenty minutes. He'd have been miles away."

"Even so." The inspector did not appreciate people stonewalling him with logic.

Piper remembered Hagen's dying words and decided to offer them up even though they made him look bad. Having explained how he had switched off the light and hidden in the back room while his friends were murdered, he had been dealt another of the policeman's scornful stares. Now he admitted, "Hagen spoke to me just before he died. 'Said slow.' "

"Said slow?"

"I guess he meant I was slow in getting to him."

"You didn't exactly go charging into the breach."

Alone again, Piper could think of nothing to do but have the sleep he was missing. The police had warned him to touch nothing in the living room, they might want to go over it again. They took the front-door key, so when he let himself out it would be forever.

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"What about the marks on the mirror?" he asked the departing inspector.

"National Front? They sometimes kill people. Were your friends anti-fascists?"

"Not that I was aware."

"We'll check it."

Piper moved his things to a furnished room, asking himself as he paid a week in advance why he was not on an airplane flying home. He wasn't interested in playing for the Streatham Strollers now, even if they'd have him, which was no sure thing. Ford Hagen as goal-tender and respected member of the team had promised to recommend him. Now Ford was gone and maybe he should go, too.

Instead, he sat in a chair in a room with sad wallpaper drinking tins of beer and watching daytime television, that glossy English picture looking smooth as an oil painting. They had their silly game shows but the big difference was no commercials on two of the channels. Also, many of the faces had bad teeth.

As he wasted a couple of days in this way, not shaving, mildly in shock, waiting for the inspector to ring and announce that he had arrested a maniac with National Front sympathies, Piper's mind turned constantly to the dying dog. Not his friend Ford, or Annie the innocent wife, but brave Gringo, racing to his master's assistance regardless of danger to himself. After it was all over, Hagen had blamed him for being slow. But that loyal dog saw him only as a friend who was able to put him out of his misery.

A news program came on the box. They worked through the current crop of work stoppages and factory closures, then got down to the local stories. Ford Hagen's name was mentioned, then up came the face of the man who owned the hockey team—wealthy businessman, owner of a thriving automobile dealership, head of the South London Commercial Association, Mr. Cedric Sloane.

As Sloane was interviewed, expressing his shock at the loss of his imported goal-tender, Piper decided he would not like to buy a car, new or used, from this man. Broad-faced, russet-skinned, pale eyes wide behind rimless glasses, the man exuded a farmer sincerity that rang as true as a plastic wine glass. But it was the friendly form of address used over and over again by the announcer that began to get through to Piper. He heard it as, "Said . . . said . . . said . . . " but realized in the end that it was an abbreviation of Cedric. At the close of the interview, the broadcaster turned to the camera: "That

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was Ced Sloane, owner of the Streatham Strollers, who this week lost his all-star goal-minder."

Ced Sloane. Said slow.

Piper snapped open another tin of beer and weighed the possibilities. Was it characteristic of Ford Hagen to needle a good friend with his dying words? Or was it more likely that he offered the name of his killer, Ced Sloane. Not that the sanctimonious tycoon was in the apartment that night pulling the trigger. He would have paid somebody to do his killing.

Piper decided not to telephone the police station. More than likely the detective would attend the funeral, scanning the faces of the mourners for a sort of involuntary police lineup. Next morning, shaved and dressed in his good suit, he went to the chapel where the service was being held. Hagen had played so many seasons in England, he had more friends here than back in Canada. His coffin and Annie's were lined up on the track, ready to roll through the curtain to the furnace.

The inspector was in the crowd. When the last prayer was said, Piper got out fast and waited on the pavement in unexpected sunshine. "I have a new lead," he said when the policeman joined him.

"I spoke to a man at the National Front," the inspector said. "This was nothing to do with them, they're using all their resources to hassle Asians in the East End. The killer must have thought he could send us down the wrong road."

Piper shook his head. "It occurred to me when I saw him on television. Cedric Sloane. Ford wasn't telling me I was slow just before he died. He was giving me a name. Ced Sloane."

The inspector stared at Piper as if his eyes were printing the stock-market prices. "Sloane owns the hockey team. Hagen was his goal-minder. You're telling me he had him killed?"

"Why don't you ask him?"

"He's one of the leading figures in South London. Why don't I ask you? We have only your word there was an intruder."

"Do you believe I shot my friend and his wife and their dog?"

"No. And I won't believe Cedric Sloane was behind it until you show me motive." The inspector moved away. Then he came back to drive the final nail into the box holding Piper's supposition. "Sloane is on Her Majesty's next Honors List. He's going to be Sir Cedric."

"And I shall be Queen of the May," Piper murmured, but not until the officer was out of earshot . . .

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Piper decided he could not leave England without having a word with Cedric Sloane. He took a taxi to Wimbledon and climbed out in front of the glass facade of Sloane Motor Sales, which occupied almost an entire block on The Broadway not far from the Town Hall. He went inside and asked the receptionist if he could see the boss. Letting his Canadian accent hang out, he told her he was a friend of the late Ford Hagen, a fellow hockey player.

She was a big blonde, with short hair brushed forward around a boyish face with level blue eyes. When she left the desk and walked away, Piper watched her rangy legs and found himself wishing it was a long walk. She returned from the inner office and said, "He's busy but he can spare you five minutes."

The television camera hadn't lied about anything except stature. Sloane was bereft of sincerity but he was shorter than he had appeared on screen.

"Thank you for seeing me, sir," Piper said. "There's something I have to ask you."

"You must be the defenseman Ford was telling me about. If you're half the player he said, there's a place for you with the Strollers."

"It has to do with Ford. I was with him when he died."

The businessman looked surprised. "I understood they were alone."

"I was asleep in the back room." This was the lie Piper was telling to justify his avoidance of trouble. "I heard the shots. By the time I could get to the front room, the killer was gone. But Ford was still alive. And he told me something."

"This is news to me."

"He said your name. His dying words were, 'Ced Sloane.' "

Sloane waited. "Well?"

"Why did he mention your name?"

"Don't ask me. Maybe he wanted you to come to me about playing hockey."

"I don't think it was that vague. When a man is dying, he says something important. In this case, I think he was telling me the identity of the man behind the murder."

"Where is your proof?"

"I haven't any. It's just a hunch." Piper stared at Sloane. "But there's the way you've started talking louder."

Sloane's face darkened. "You don't *know* how loud I can talk," he thundered. "My voice carries a long way in this part of the world."

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He controlled himself with difficulty. "And you, my boy, can forget about playing ice hockey anywhere in England."

"It's the motive that's got me baffled. The inspector asked me, where's the motive?"

"You've told this rubbish to the police?"

Piper nodded. "Waste of time. Your cops are even more establishment-oriented than the ones back home. Never criticize a pillar of the community, it isn't done, old boy. It's not on."

"Let me complete your education," Sloane said. "If you spread this story anywhere else, you'll find yourself in court facing a suit for slander."

Piper retreated from the inner office. He felt humiliated, controlled. The ancient Greeks must have experienced the same feeling of insignificance when their gods had finished knocking them about. He was heading for the street door when the receptionist came after him.

"What was the explosion in there?"

"Mr. Sloane doesn't like me."

"He's that way with a lot of people." She looked him in the eye. "What's your crime?"

"Not mine, his." Piper took a chance and told her part of his suspicions. "I don't believe Sloane was at the scene," he concluded, "but he made it happen."

She checked her watch against the wall clock. "It's my lunch break. Can we talk?"

"My pleasure."

She used the intercom to advise her boss that she would be away for an hour. Then she grabbed her handbag and hurried after Piper with the athletic stride of a girl on a playground. "By the way," she said, "I'm Karen Martingale." She gave Piper a hand that was connected to an inner power source. The jolt got his motor started and the hockey player suddenly remembered what fun it is to be alive.

They lunched on shepherd's pie at a pub called The Prince of Wales. Piper drank lager, Karen white wine. The place was nicely crowded, a hundred subdued conversations combining to produce a pleasant buzz. Kids shot pool on a toy table at the back. At the other end, near the bar, men and women paid attention to horse racing on the telly—the only reason why a lot of English people bother to get out of bed in the morning.

After some small talk, Piper restated his theory regarding the

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double murder based on the dying man's last words which he now took to have been "Ced Sloane." A serious mood froze the girl's fork halfway to her mouth. "It fits together," she said.

"What does?"

"A couple of weeks ago, Cedric and I were going to lunch. We stopped off at the bank and he went in to get something from his safety-deposit box. He came back with a thick brown envelope."

"Could have been money."

"Then we made one more stop, at a place called the Aston Recreation Club near Tooting High Street. Cedric went in carrying the envelope and came back without it."

"It means only one thing to me," Piper said.

"Should we go to the police?"

"I've lost my faith in your police."

"Then we do nothing?"

"*I* do something. Fortunately, I have a return ticket to Montreal. I think I'll fly back and report to the Verdun Shamrocks training camp. I'd better make some money."

The girls looked wistful. There was something about the woman's body and the boyish face that reached Piper on a subtle level. "I'd love to see Montreal," she said. "There's no use quitting Sloane and trying to work some other place around here. He'll come and get me."

"Then come with me. I'm sorry, you'll have to buy your own ticket."

"I've got a couple of thousand saved." She gave him a conspiratorial grin. "I can probably help you with the rent."

Another idea began climbing up out of the pool in Piper's mind where the self-destructive urge was suspended in acid. "There's something I want to try before we leave town," he said.

They needed an envelope, so they stopped at a stationery store and bought a few of the kind Sloane had used on the day he made his collection from the safety-deposit box. Sitting in Karen's car, Piper printed a message on a sheet of paper. Before folding it and sealing it inside an envelope, he showed it to the girl at the wheel. "Any man who would shoot a dog," it read, "is not fit to walk the streets."

As Piper licked the gummed flap, Karen said, "If Sloane's transaction was innocent, the bloke who reads this will wonder if the world has gone mad."

The Aston Recreation Club displayed a brightly painted frontage

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halfway down a row of decaying terraced houses. "Wait for me," Piper said as he got out of the car.

"Shouldn't I come with you?"

"Keep the engine running."

He went inside and found himself in a low-ceilinged room with a dozen snooker tables floating in darkness, each within its shaded glow like so many phosphorescent life forms at five hundred fathoms. On a dais near the back, men sat around a table frowning at fists full of cards. There was a bar on one side with shelves of bottles and a couple of pump handles for drawing beer. The man at the bar was working with glue and sandpaper, fitting a new tip to a billiard cue.

Piper approached with a confident stride and slapped the envelope on the bar. "When Ced Sloane was in here a couple of weeks ago—"

"Sir?" The man kept sanding but he was listening.

"The envelope was light. He wants this to go to the bloke concerned."

"It shall be done."

Piper went along with the flighty language. "It must be seen to be done."

The barman called across the room to the card players. "Eddie?" Nobody moved. "Eddie Poole. You're wanted."

A slab of darkness shifted and moved into the light. The kibitzer, Eddie Poole, shambled forward, wearing a one-piece mechanic's suit without a trace of grease on it. "You called?" The head on Poole's shoulders was pale white, vaguely pointed at the top, and it produced an oily glow.

"This is for you," the barman said, pushing the envelope across the mahogany.

"Special delivery from Ced Sloane," Piper added.

Poole picked up the envelope, held it beside his head, listened to it as if it was a cigar. "Who are *you?*"

"Just doing a friend a favor."

"American?"

"The top end," Piper said. "Up where the map goes red." Then he left the recreation club quickly, reasoning that Poole's recreation, when he opened the envelope, might consist of making bootholes in Piper's ribs.

Karen got her car off the side road and into traffic before she said, "What do you think?"

"The man's name is Eddie Poole. Whether he did it or not, he looks capable." Piper gave his instinct a chance to be heard. "He did it."

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"Shouldn't you tell the police?"

"A waste of ten pence," Piper said, "assuming we could find a telephone that works."

"There's a phone in my bedroom," she said. "I hate to see you frustrated like this."

The detective-inspector said everything Piper expected him to say. The evidence was circumstantial. Yes, they knew about Eddie Poole, a small-time local gambler. But how could they prove the envelope from Sloane contained money? It could have been accounts receivable—maybe Sloane had debts that needed collecting. Anyway, nobody could stand up in court and say Poole had taken money from Sloane to kill Ford Hagen.

Piper put the telephone back on the bedside table. Karen was sitting beside him with her knees together and her hands in her lap. It was such a domestic setting, they might have been about to compose a grocery list for the weekend. Karen's thoughts seemed to be running parallel to his. She said, "Have you ever been married, Allan?"

"Nobody ever asked me," he said, reaching nervously for a flimsy joke to keep the scene from becoming serious. He was back in Baytown riding in a taxi late at night, coming home from a farmhouse on the edge of town with the inside of his mouth raw from kissing. He was seventeen years old, it was early winter, and the propane heater which would explode and burn the house with everybody in it was a couple of hours away from going off. Connie must have been brushing her teeth, smiling vacantly at herself in the mirror, not bothered any more about the lovemaking, knowing that come June she would be married to Allan Piper, the pretty good young hockey player.

Karen put an arm around his shoulder, drew him gently back to the present. "Don't look so sad," she said. "I'm on the pill. I only wanted to know if I was with somebody else's man."

"You're with nobody's man," he said. "Not even my own."

An hour later, he was falling asleep beside this girl in the middle of a lazy London summer afternoon. If he could keep this up, life might be worth another try.

Piper had been back in Montreal for so long that he had stopped picking up the London papers at the International News. What was the use? Not a word was going down about anybody helping police

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with their inquiries into the murder of Ford and Annie Hagen. And gentle, noble Gringo. The file was closed and Cedric Sloane was selling cars from his Wilmbledon showroom—maybe buying and selling lives, too, if anybody else was getting in his way.

It was late October and the first snow was falling on Montreal. Winter was back early, eager to take possession again after a short absence. Karen was waiting for Piper after the team finished practicing. She refused to hang around in the chilly arena but was crouched over a cognac in the brasserie across the street. When she saw her man come in, she raised her chin to the waiter and two foaming glasses of draft beer were on the table by the time Piper had slung his coat on a nail.

"How did it go?"

"Not bad." He was a few pounds lighter than he had been in London, a notch or two tighter. "We should be ready for Chicoutimi when they show on Saturday."

After the practice and the beer, he was hungry. They ordered steaks and salads. Eating in silence, he provoked her into saying, "You can't get it out of your mind."

"More than anything it's the dog," he admitted. "Just before the shooting started, he was lying at the end of my bed. Those eyes." Piper set knife and fork across unwanted food. "He looked at me as if the world was never going to end. Then that bastard Poole broke in."

"If it was Poole."

"It was him. I know it but I can't prove it."

"You don't even have a motive. You say Ced Sloane hired Poole to do the killing. Why?"

"I've been thinking about that." Piper reached into his back pocket and drew out a tattered magazine. He handed it to Karen who turned a few pages.

"A hockey program for a Canadiens' game," she said.

"I found it in Hagen's apartment. Here, let me find you the page." He leafed through and found the photo of goal-tender Larocque with the handwriting across it. "Ford must have written that."

Karen read aloud. "I have to do it—I'm not as good as you." She turned the program over as if looking for an answer. "What does it mean?"

"What if Hagen was involved in throwing the occasional game? Letting in a goal or two so the Strollers would lose when they were expected to win."

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"Sloane gambles," Karen confirmed.

"Ford was doing this so Sloane could profit. Taking money to throw games." Piper looked again at the tortured handwriting. "He hated himself for doing it. And one day he was looking at this picture of Larocque, a guy who bleeds whenever a puck goes past him. Maybe he was drunk. Full of self-pity. So he wrote this justification."

"It may be true. But why would Sloane have him killed?"

"That's easy," Piper said. "Hagen was going to blow the whistle. Confess publicly."

Two inches of snow lay on the car's windshield when they came out of the brasserie. Piper brushed off the front, Karen did the back, then they got in and drove away. "Autumn in Montreal," he muttered as packed snow groaned under the tires.

"When are you going to forget this?" Karen said.

"When I get to the bottom of it."

"This isn't what I wanted."

"What do you want."

"Happiness."

"Too much unfinished business," Piper said grimly.

The telephone rang in the night. Karen answered and Piper lay half awake, listening. "This is a crazy time to call. Are you drunk? No, I'm not coming back, I think I like it better here." She sounded coy. "Do what you like," she concluded. "I can't stop you."

Piper hoisted himself onto one elbow, reached across Karen and took the telephone from her. The voice mumbling on the overseas line was the one he expected to hear. "Mr. Sloane," he said, "this is Allan Piper."

"The two of you together in the middle of the night," Sloane said. "Now I get the picture."

"You had Ford Hagen killed and you got away with it. Now here you are sniffing around where you can only make more trouble."

"Persuade Karen to come back to London. Or I'll show you what trouble can be."

"How does it feel to be above the law?"

"I won't wait forever."

The telephone went down at the other end. Piper replaced his bedside receiver in the cradle. Then Karen opened her arms and accepted him against the warmth of her body. He relaxed and floated in a pocket of invulnerability. This was not sex, it was reassur-

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ance—and Piper decided that the saddest thing in the world is somebody sleeping alone.

The idea of holding a Ford Hagen Memorial Game emerged around that time—the only question was why nobody had thought of it sooner. It meant a sellout on a night when the rink would otherwise have been dark. The Shamrocks all wore black armbands. The opposition was a team of all-stars, including Verdun old-timers and a couple of local lads who had made it to the big league with the Islanders and the Nordiques.

Piper felt strange staring at the blue line with his head bowed during the silence in memory of Hagen. Knowing what he knew, it seemed improper that the business should remain unfinished. And having failed Hagen on the big night, what right had Allan Piper to be out here on the ice paying tribute? At the very least, he ought to start the game in the penalty box.

The first period was almost over when he saw Cedric Sloane and Eddie Poole in their rink-side seats. They looked more prosperous than the hockey fans around them. While he was on the bench between shifts, Piper couldn't keep his eyes off them. Even when he was on the ice, he felt his attention divided between the game and the English visitors. He caught sight of Karen in her seat halfway up the stands. Had she seen them yet?

When play ended after the first twenty minutes, Piper skated over to the boards and spoke to Sloane. "Nice of you to come all this way," he said. "Hagen would be pleased."

"The game is only a sidelight," Sloane said. "We're here to collect Karen and take her back home."

"That won't work. Unless you've added kidnaping to your list of activities."

"Clever bastard," Poole said. He took hold of the player's sweater.

Sloane knocked his hand away. "Are you crazy?"

"We all know the answer to that one," Piper said. As he started to skate away, Sloane spoke to him seriously.

"By the way, is this your best game, Piper? If it is, I'm afraid you'd never have won a place on my team."

During the third period, Piper was on the bench again, replaced by one of the younger players. He cared, but not very much. He noticed the two rink-side seats were empty. Glancing up at Karen's place, he saw that she had left the arena, too. An uneasy feeling

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cramped his gut. He wondered what the coach would say if he left the bench and got changed. It wouldn't go down well—he was barely holding onto his job with the team as it was.

Showered and changed, he got into his car and drove home. The night was frosty clear. He rolled into the lane beside the building, unlocked his garage, and parked the car inside.

Upstairs, Karen was in the bedroom, her suitcase open on the bed. "Whatever else they say about Ced Sloane," Piper said from the doorway, "the man sure can sell."

"This is better for everybody, Allan."

"A hell of a lot better for Karen Martingale."

She paused in her movements between wardrobe and suitcase. She came to him. "In London, I really believed this was what I wanted. For the first few weeks here, I thought the same. I've never lied to you."

"The other night in bed, I lay in your arms and I thought I could be all right."

"We're good together in a lot of ways. But there's more to getting through life. Every day has twenty-four hours in it." She returned to her packing. "I have to see to my future."

"And Allan Piper doesn't have any."

"The way things are, you're a hockey player at the end of his career. You have nothing after you retire. What do you intend to do?"

"They always need somebody to sweep the rink."

"That's just what I mean." Her suitcase closed and that abrupt thud was the last sound between them for a while.

Later, in the kitchen, she found him having a drink. He offered to pour one for her but she refused.

"Are they coming to pick you up?"

She glanced at her watch. "In a few minutes."

Piper quoted a song that was popular when he was young and before Karen was born. "So long," he said, "it's been good to know ya."

His mind was made up by the time the front doorbell rang. "Do me a favor," he said, offering her a ten-dollar bill. "I'm going to need a bottle of whisky."

"Can't you go?"

"I'm half dressed. Will you do this one thing for me?"

She took the money, their relationship having deteriorated into

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that of a sullen child with her troublesome father. She passed Sloane and Poole at the door. "Back soon," she said as she headed for the street.

"How are we for hard feelings?" Sloane said, entering the kitchen.

"None whatever. Have a drink."

"It's a pity," Poole said. "I'm good at sorting out hard feelings." He sat at the table.

"Take a look at him, Eddie," Sloane said. "You can always spot the athlete over the hill. He becomes a loser."

Piper had poured three drinks and now he handed them around. "I'm backing off," he said, "because it's better for Karen without me around."

"Karen knows her place," Sloane said. He raised his glass. "Good health."

"Long life." Piper drank. "Something you should see," he said. He took Sloane by the arm and led him out of the kitchen. "An old photograph of Ford Hagen as a lad." In the living room, he bent to retrieve an album. "Would you switch on that light?"

As Sloane turned to fumble with the lamp switch, Piper rose with a lead doorstop in his hand, raised it, and brought it down across the Englishman's head, caught him as he fell and lowered the unconscious body onto the settee.

"Poole!" he called. "Could you come in here?" Then he stood beside the doorway, the weight in his hand. As Eddie came into the room, Piper swung sidearm and took him across the forehead. He made no attempt to catch him as he fell.

Now he had to hurry. Karen would be back in a few minutes. Hoisting Sloane in a fireman's lift, he carried him down the stairs, out the door, and along the lane to the garage. He managed to open the door, lug Sloane inside, and sling him across the back seat. Then he hurried back for Poole and brought him downstairs to join his unconscious boss inside the car.

Piper made one last trip upstairs to write the note. He scribbled quickly on the pad they used for grocery lists, tore off the page, and left it on the kitchen table.

"Karen:

I've gone and taken Sloane and Poole with me. Don't try to follow. Go back to London and forget you ever knew any of us.

Love, if that's what it was.

Allan."

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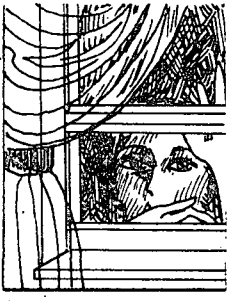
He left the front door of the apartment on the latch so she could get in. Then he went inside the garage and closed the door. It was dark—he had to feel his way, hands on freezing metal, to get inside and behind the wheel. When he switched on, the dash lighted up to keep him company.

There was plenty of gas in the tank, the motor would idle for a long time. Longer than would be needed. The stunned men in the back seat lay without moving. Piper folded his arms and closed his eyes. He smelled frosty air and the pungent odor of exhaust fumes. Minute followed minute on the face of the dashboard clock.

Nelson Flanagan came out into the lane carrying old Prince in his arms and lowered him gently into the cardboard box. The kids held back, aware of what an important thing was happening that day.

Gringo raised his head from Piper's lap and gave him a look that said there was nothing to be afraid of. Piper slept.



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LOUIS WEINSTEIN

Hymie Goldfarb, who owned a supermarket on Upper Broadway, was losing his help and his customers and couldn't figure out why. And so his friend, Harry Lubin, the jeweler, offered his young employee's services for two weeks. Lou was a crackerjack at figuring out business swindles, Harry told him—"if anyone can help you, he can . . ."

THINK LIKE A SCHEMER

by LOUIS WEINSTEIN

Working in a supermarket on Manhattan's Upper West Side, my friend Howie Samuels told me, would be an education worth at least two years at Harvard. My first day at Goldfarb's Elite Market I found out Howie was right. The place was a circus.

Of course, I wasn't there on a grant from the Hymie Goldfarb Foundation to make a scholarly study of the human race in action. Hymie isn't that kind of philanthropist. I got steered there by my boss, Harry Lubin, who can't resist bragging to his friends—and anyone else equipped with ears—about how his young jeweler is a crackerjack at figuring out business swindles.

It began when Goldfarb—stocky, semi-bald, and puffing cigar smoke through a full black moustache—waddled into the jewelry loft to place a special order for a diamond brooch for his wife. As they talked business, Harry continued working alongside me at the bench. The details settled, Goldfarb asked, "How's the market business?"

"Not bad. But it could be better. I've got a couple of problems," Goldfarb answered.

"Problems? What kind of problems?"

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Goldfarb glanced sideways at me. "I'm losing help, and losing customers, and I can't figure out why. It's starting to hurt."

"Hold your horses," Harry said. "Lou—" he turned to me "—in case you weren't listening, Hymie has problems might interest you." To Hymie he went on, "This boy, Lou Mandel, is good. If anyone can help you, he can." Before you knew it, Goldfarb was getting the A to Z on my cases, starting with my trapping Harry's gold-stealing ex-partner.

Goldfarb looked at me appraisingly.

"A kid like this working undercover might be just the ticket. Can you lend him to me?"

"Under my ground rules," Harry recited his by-heart spiel. "First, no mufkyfufky with the fee because he's young. Second, I can't spare him more than two weeks. Third, while he's working for you, you pay him what I pay. Next, he has to volunteer, I can't twist his arm."

"Hold your horses, Harry," I said. "At your service, Mr. Goldfarb." I like being a jeweler but what can beat sleuthing?

"So it's a deal." Goldfarb waved his fist and gave me an exaggerated wink, like a coach telling his troops to go get 'em. "Here's where I am." He handed me a business card. "I got to run now. Start tomorrow at ten. I'll fill you in then."

Coming out of the subway next morning, I was running early so I took the two blocks to the Elite at a slow amble, soaking up the May sunshine and getting the feel of the neighborhood. Broadway was already swarming with people—in slacks, saris, bluejeans, shorts, rags. A cosmopolitan scene, down to earth, bustling, alive. Howie sometimes gets carried away, but I could understand what he meant about the Upper West Side being raw, rough, and bleeding—a different world than the predictable, sedate East Side. The derelicts were already slumped on the benches along the mid-street islands separating the uptown and downtown traffic. Empty beer cans and wine bottles were already piled at their feet. Furtive, dirty winos and junkies, looking as if they'd spent the night in a dusty cellar or dark alley, lounged at the street corners, blinking in the sunshine.

The only thing elite about Goldfarb's was the sign and that needed a paint job. But the rest of the Elite's exterior was no dingier or older-looking than the other storefronts jammed together along the street.

Inside was a small operation as supermarkets go. Along the wall

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to the left were nested shopping carts, stacks of soft drinks and returned deposit bottles, dog food in big heavy-paper sacks, an ice-vending machine, and a canned-soda dispensing machine. Farther in at the left were the checkout counters, just five of them. Off to the right, a two-level office separated the store proper by a glass partition. On the lower, street level, two girls were working. The clear glass windows of the offices on the upper level looked out over the market floor.

I entered the lower office—a springy wooden floor, dark with oil and age, underfoot—and a tall dark-haired girl with eyeglasses got up from her desk.

"I'm Lou Mandel, starting work here today."

"We've been expecting you," she smiled. "Have a seat."

She took my social-security number, address, home phone, and details of my pedigree. As she filled out the forms, she kept studying me like a puzzle. I'd been through this routine often enough to know what it meant. She was busting to say something like, Why is a bright-looking kid like you coming to work for minimum wage at a crud job in a dilapidated neighborhood? "Go upstairs," she said. "Mr. Goldfarb wants to talk to you."

A circular staircase brought me onto a narrow square space between two offices, the door on either side open. Goldfarb, in the office to the left, was on the phone. I didn't wait for an invitation to go in. Files and stacks of papers cluttered his big flat-topped desk. A big black safe stood against the back wall. The place reeked of cigar smoke.

Goldfarb saw me.

"Call you back, Moe," he hung up. He glanced toward the other office. My eyes followed his. A great big hulk of a man in his late twenties with red hair and a ruddy complexion and broad Irish face was bent over the desk. Surrounded by an ocean of papers, he was tapping away at a calculator.

"Pete," Goldfarb yelled through the open door, "you better go down check out the milk! There seems to be a problem with the delivery!" I wasn't sure if Goldfarb winked at me. It could have been a blink from the cigar smoke insulting his eyes.

"Okay, Hymie." Pete gave the calculator a final rap. He had a stogie going, too. When he stood up, I appreciated how big he was—at least six feet tall, and broad, wider than my father, shoulders like potato sacks, and arms muscled like a professional bear wrestler's.

He moved lightly, like an athlete, down the narrow stairs.

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"You already got an idea of the big picture. Now for the details," Goldfarb began.

First he wanted me to find out why his help kept drifting away. Just yesterday, for instance, Julio had walked out without a word after picking up his pay envelope. A good kid, Julio. A good worker. On the job only a month and just starting to be really useful. The big turnover was driving Goldfarb bananas—all the extra paperwork, hiring replacements, getting caught short at peak times.

For almost a year it was this way, too long to be accidental. Sure, turnover was expected with unskilled help. They got better jobs; joined the army; got in trouble; got sick of being poor in dirty, crowded New York and went back to being poor on the sunny shores of Puerto Rico or some other island paradise. But none of these reasons explained why his competitors were immune to the problem. Was it sensible for a kid to kiss the Elite goodbye and turn up a day or two later doing the same work for some guy down the street?

Second, Goldfarb couldn't understand why so many of his really good customers were taking their trade elsewhere. Cornered on the street, the strayers claimed it cost more to shop the Elite. That was a puzzler. Goldfarb's regular prices were rock bottom. His specials were real specials, not advertising hooey. And he delivered without a nickel extra charge—something hardly any of his competitors did.

I told Goldfarb. "It sounds to me the ripoff's at the checkout."

"Where else?" Goldfarb said. "Okay, go to work. In the store, I treat you like anyone else. I don't want anyone, *not even Pete,* to get any ideas about why you're here. Start with helping bag."

Just then Pete reappeared. "No big problem—just a few leakers. One of the boys is mopping up now."

"Good." Goldfarb nodded. "Pete, this is Lou Mandel, our new boy. Lou, meet Pete Moriarity, my right-hand man."

Pete's smile was friendly, but his shrewd blue eyes were reading me. Undoubtedly, he was wondering what a duck was doing enlisting in an army of chickens. We shook hands. I considered myself lucky to get away from the crush of his catcher's mitt fist with only a few numb fingers.

A minute later, standing behind the checkouts, I eyeballed the situation. A lanky, sort of stooped guy manned the middle register. Middle or late twenties, dark wavy hair, thin lips, jutting chin, potato nose. Ugly in an unwholesome way. At the register to his left was a stick-thin girl, so young-looking she should have been home playing with Barbie dolls. Not bad-looking in a saucy, big-eyed Latin

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way. At *her* left was a vaguely sexy, plump, fairly young woman with streaked blonde hair. To the register at the right of the lanky guy was a very pretty, fine-featured black girl with a knockout figure. And last in the lineup stood a stumpy, unsmiling little black-Hispanic woman. Not much past thirty, I guessed, but already old.

A young fellow was bagging, jumping back and forth among the registers, busting his gut but still obviously unable to keep up with the five checkout clerks. He was about my age, around eighteen, fairly tall, and on the skinny side but wiry-looking. He had long black hair, regular features, soft eyes. Very handsome—a young Ricardo Montalban. What hit me most about him, though, was the worried, nervous way his roving eyes kept returning to the store entrance. Was he expecting a cop to barrel in and slap the cuffs on him? Was he involved in drugs? Being hunted by an outraged brother or boy friend or even a jealous husband?

"Okay, people." I stepped up close to the middle checkout and let out a bellow I was sure they could all hear. "Are you ready for Lou Mandel? Well, here I am, big as life and twice as sassy. With me around, this place will never be the same. Taratara-tara!" I struck a pose. Silly as hell, but I wanted to see what kind of reactions I got.

Blondie gave me a blank stare. The saucy Latin kid smiled.

"Sassy, huh?" Her voice was a surprisingly deep rumble. "My name's Bella. Pleased to meet you, Lou. Let's see if you work as sassy as you talk."

The lanky guy inspected me sourly for a few seconds. Evidently he didn't like what he saw. "Pipe down, jerk," he said disgustedly and turned away from me to cast a watchful eye over the shoppers.

"Don't let Ramon bother you." Bella gave him a sidelong glance. "He picks on all the new guys."

He mumbled through a dirty look.

The pretty black girl at the register to his right laughed, gave me a wave, and said, "Hello, Lou. It's nice to have someone cheerful around here for a change."

Shaking her head, refusing to become involved, the young-old woman shuffled groceries along the counter.

The big, unexpected reaction came from the skinny bagger, who nearly climbed out of his skin.

"Man," he said to me, "you shouldn't go around scaring people that way! I thought it was a holdup!"

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"Sorry," I told him. "I won't do it again. I'm supposed to start bagging."

"Are you here to work or exercise your jaw?" the lanky cashier demanded.

"Eliondo Huerte's the name," the bagger introduced himself, taking me aside. "Cover the two end spots. Stay away from that guy. He's bad medicine."

The work was no sweat. I kept up my chatter. Denise, the pretty black girl, was very helpful, answering my questions freely. She was twenty-one, single, a night college student. She agreed to show me how to run the antique registers someday when things were slack.

Rita, the clam, was a three-year veteran at Goldfarb's and never cracked a smile. She was a speed demon with the keys and didn't once refer to the price sheets atop the register. Denise told me Rita didn't have much to smile about, a runaway husband having left her with three young children.

Denise's nose wrinkled in distaste when I asked her about Ramon. "Him? A macho man. Drives a Corvette, keeps it in a parking garage. Not bad for a grocery clerk, hey? Just look at him, sizing up the customers. You'd think he owns the place."

I looked his way. Sure enough, while a woman was unloading her cart, Ramon was sizing up the customers in and near his line.

Denise showed she didn't like Ramon but he kept smiling and throwing conversation at her in a way that suggested he fancied himself a certified Romeo. His name, she eventually set me straight, was Raymond, not Ramon, as I distinctly heard Bella pronounce it. That was one of Bella's ways of hitting at him. Raymond had been with Goldfarb's a little over a year. He also held some other kind of job—around Wall Street, Denise thought, but wasn't sure.

From bagging I moved on to shelf loading, with Eliondo showing me how to operate the price-stamping machine and to rotate the stock. He was pleasant and knew what he was doing, but he was as jumpy as a toy poodle caged in with Great Dane puppies. Anyone coming near him had to pass an immediate eye check, and he was always glancing toward the front door.

"Where you from, Eliondo?" I tried to make talk.

He studied me before answering.

"I live in Manhattan, a few blocks from here."

"With your folks?"

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"Why do you ask?" He showed annoyance. "What business is it of yours?"

I changed the subject fast.

"You speak pretty good English. Did you learn it in school?"

"My favorite subject. I studied hard." He looked at me intently—with fear, hostility. "You ask too many questions. Why don't you just do your job?" He busied himself stacking cans on the shelves.

Lunchtime came. I found out Goldfarb was really good to his help. At the back, in a little storage room next to the meat section, he had a setup where we could eat and take breaks. Table, chairs, a coffee percolator, a small grimy refrigerator stocked with sandwich makings and soft drinks. Surprisingly, only a few employees were there. Evidently most preferred a hot dog, hamburger, or pizza at a Broadway food shop.

Two of the three young Puerto Ricans who ran the deli and appetizing department were having lunch. Tomas, rolypoly and jovial, laughed a lot, showing gold teeth. But Bill—for Guillermo, I learned later—was very quiet and had a sullen, harassed look. It was an eye-opener, telling a lot about New York's changing scene, to hear Tomas, between ecstatic bites of that famous Puerto Rican delicacy—cream cheese, lox, and a slice of raw onion on a bagel—telling Bill to cut up some more matjes herring, it was moving faster than the pickled.

After they left, alone in the quiet room, I became aware of voices coming from beyond the door that opened onto an outside alley behind the market. I couldn't make out what was said until an argument began. I recognized Raymond's voice first.

"I don't want to hear any more hard-luck excuses. If you know what's good for you, have the dough for me Monday. You hear? No fooling around."

"You'll get it," Eliondo said, his voice not as loud as Raymond's. "You know I always pay."

"Darn right you pay. Just remember that."

The door came open. Raymond entered, moving as if he hurt, limping and holding onto his hip. He stopped alongside me.

"Hello," I faced him. "How's it going, Ramon?"

"Raymond," he corrected me, scowling, letting me know *he* was no despised Juan Come Lately, scratching to climb out of the bottom of the barrel. "Want me to spell the name for you?"

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"Sorry about that, Raymond. My mistake. I thought I heard someone call you Ramon."

"Don't be a dummy, Lou. Don't be like them. What's it going to get you, playing up to them?"

I didn't answer.

He went on, "Use your smarts—if you have any. Even in a dump like this, you'd be surprised how it can pay off."

I was wondering what he meant, and if he knew I'd overheard the tail-end of his conversation with Eliondo. I wondered, too, what was keeping Eliondo, who had come in with me, eaten fast, and then gone into the alley.

"I'll keep it in mind," I said, appearing disinterested.

He started for the door to the market just as the back door opened. He halted, and followed Eliondo across the room with his eyes. "See you at the checkout," he told us both.

When he was gone, I said, "What's the matter, Eliondo? Did you have a fight with Raymond?"

"What makes you think that?" His eyes narrowed with suspicion.

"The way you look."

"You heard, didn't you, Lou?" he said quietly.

"Not all of it, but enough."

"Then you know," he said sadly.

"Sure I know," I said, feeling sorry for him. "It's *sin papeles,* isn't it? What else could it be?"

I'd hit his panic button. He brushed past me and out the door.

I caught up with him in front of the meat display and grabbed his arm. "Hold it. I'm not a cop. I'm not from Immigration. I won't turn you in. Don't run off."

He wrenched free. I looped my arms around his middle. He twisted from my grasp and aimed a roundhouse at me. I ducked that one, did some fast footwork, and caught the next two or three on my arms. I didn't swing back.

The cavalry arrived to break up the fracas. Pete Moriarity wedged his bulk between us and grabbed each of us by the arm and held us apart. "What's this all about?" he asked Eliondo. "I'm surprised at you."

"Nothing—it's nothing," Eliondo said.

"Lou, behave," Pete said, looking at me in a way that made me suspect he knew I wasn't just someone Goldfarb happened to scoop in off the street. "You're not here for this kind of roughhouse. What-

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ever it was, shake hands and forget about it. Get back to work and see it doesn't happen again, or I bang heads."

"Just a misunderstanding," I said. "Right, Eliondo?"

"That's all," Eliondo said sullenly.

We shook hands and went back to work, bagging, without any conversation. But later Pete put us loading shelves together and I decided to try to get it straight with Eliondo.

"I know you're an illegal," I said. "I'm not out to harm you. You might as well tell me the rest."

For a second I thought he was going to flare up again. Then the tension went out of him and along with it the fear and the anger.

"You found out what you wanted. Now just leave me alone."

"You alone in New York?"

"*Si,*" he lapsed into Spanish.

"What about your family?"

"They're in Ecuador. Very poor. I have three small sisters. I came to New York to make money, help them. Each time I get paid, I send money. I stay with cousins here. I came on a ship, as crew. I jumped ship."

"Happens all the time," I said. "New York is full of *sin papeles.* I don't blame you . . . You don't have much left after Raymond's through squeezing, do you?"

"Not much, but what can I do?"

"And he does this thing with the other boys?"

"The ones without papers."

"How'd he find out about you?"

"The day after I started here, he accused me of being an illegal. He caught me by surprise and it must have shown on my face. I denied it, but he said to show him my papers, then he'd believe it. I couldn't—so now I pay him for silence. He has the soul of a rat."

"If he turns you in, I turn him in. There are laws against extortion."

Eliondo shook his head. "How would that help me? I'd only have to run, move, find another job. I'm sick of that. I like it here. Goldfarb's a good boss. This way at least I have a job and can send some money back home. My father has a bad heart, can't work much. It's better I pay than look for trouble. That's life. *La vida.*"

"Maybe I can get you together with someone who can do you some good. That's *la vida,* too. Get yourself straightened out and you can laugh in his face."

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"I appreciate it," Eliondo said awkwardly, "but please, right now don't do anything, don't make waves."

By accident I'd lucked into half the answer to Goldfarb's problems. Raymond was the culprit, bleeding the Latin help, those without papers, until in fear and desperation they ran away from him. But knowing the problem didn't solve it. Telling Goldfarb wouldn't work. If he fired Raymond, Raymond would snitch to the Immigration people out of spite. One anonymous phone call, and Eliondo and others would get hurt.

Two days later, working alone, I was loading shelves near the produce department, next to bins piled with twisted yucca, llame, and youtia, potatolike root vegetables the produce man told me are favorites with the island people. A spindly-legged old Oriental wearing what looked like a too-small nightgown planted his sandaled feet right in the middle of the aisle and began strumming a funny-looking five-string instrument. Hung around his neck were a tin cup and a handprinted sign proclaiming him to be an authentic Sri-Lanka folk artist. His singing was atrocious and his dancing even worse. Hymie and Pete rushed down from the office to cut the recital short. As he hustled the guy out, Pete told me that last week he'd been a traditional Balinese dancer and the week before that a Borneo juggler.

Hymie hung around. "What's up, Lou? Anything interesting to tell me?"

"Well," I said, "there's an old character comes in every morning. Very seedy-looking. Big as a bear and just as dirty. He must be a retired pickpocket—very fast hands. Lifts a slab of cheese, stuffs it under his jacket, grabs a roll at the bread department, and segues out."

"Swiss-cheese Charley? Forget about him. If he helps himself to a little cheese, he needs it more than me. If he'd ask, I'd open a mustard jar for him, too."

"Why don't you have him arrested, or threaten to prosecute, at least run him out?"

"Lou," Hymie put his arm around me, "tell me about the grape grabbers, the cherry samplers, the nut noshers. Should I prosecute them, too? I'm running a market, not a prosecution franchise. It costs more in time, money, and trouble than it's worth. My question is, how are you doing with the *big* problem?"

"I'm making progress. It takes time."

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"Not too much time, I'm afraid. Your boss called me today to remind me I couldn't keep you over two weeks. He needs you."

"This Raymond—how long's he been with you? A year's what I understand."

"That's about right."Goldfarb nodded and looked thoughtful. "Now that you mention it, that's about how long the trouble's been going on. You think there's a connection?"

"Maybe," I said. "Any other people here around the same length of time?"

"A couple—Bella, Tomas in the Appetizing, a couple of the meat people." He threw some names at me.

"I should have asked this sooner. How do you keep the checkout clerks honest? From cheating you or the customers?"

"Like ABC's," Goldfarb said. "A clerk coming on duty we start with a certain amount of cash—say a hundred dollars in bills and silver. At the end of his or her shift the till has to have the total amount of the register ring-ups plus the starting hundred. That's what I want to see—no more, no less. If he's under, the clerk is accountable, has to make good."

"And if he's over?"

Goldfarb smiled at my innocence.

"It's never over. The clerks count their money before we close the register. How it really comes out is their little secret."

"You mean it's possible for them to hold out what may be over?"

"If it's worthwhile, they have the opportunity for shenanigans. One way is to bend down to tie a shoelace and stuff the money in a sock. That's an old trick."

"Then if a clerk has a way figured out to cheat the customers without your catching on how, he's in business?"

"If I catch anyone doing it, I'll skin him alive."

From then on, Raymond got my undivided attention. Concentrating on watching him, my work slipped. He started calling me Mopy and Luke Skywalker. But that was all right with me. I wanted him to go on thinking I was lackadaisical, not all that bright. He made no more friendly overtures. It was "Get the lead out" and "You bag like a schoolgirl." He laughed like a hyena when I knocked a bag off the counter and the bag broke and with it a big bottle of olive oil. For the rest of that day I had to put up with his jeering remarks about Sloppy Louie.

But I noticed some things. His limp got noticeably worse toward

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the end of the day. Not that that meant much—any leg problem would be aggravated by eight or nine hours of standing. Then, too, he had a habit of leaning against the side of the cash register from time to time. Was that his way of taking some of the weight off his game leg? I was curious about some other peculiarities of his behavior. For instance, why did he automatically run his eyes over the waiting customers when none of the other clerks had the same habit? And why the love affair between his hand and his hip?

Bella taunted him about that. "Hey, Gimpy, we going roller skating after work?" she would needle him. Or: "What say you and I take a week off and go skiing?" She laid it on about his night job also, saying someday he'd be the richest man in the cemetery, and just as popular there as he was in the store.

I got Goldfarb aside and questioned him.

"Suppose a customer was being cheated at the checkout, wouldn't it show up if he compared the items he bought with the register tape?"

"Sure," Goldfarb said. "But none of the customers I lost complained about the prices being phonied. Let me tell you something, Lou. How many people do you suppose bother to check if the purchases and the tapes match up? In the store, most people never look at the receipt, and damned few take the trouble to compare when they get home. That's the way people are."

"Raymond—what's his record on unders and overs?"

"He comes out short pretty often—more than the others. He's hardly ever over, and then just a few cents. I don't have time to cross-examine when I close out a register. I want what's coming to me and if he's a couple of bucks over once in a while and decides to hold out and clever enough to get away with it, what can I do? If he's short, that's his tough luck. He makes good."

"That's schemer's found a way to beat the game—I'm sure of it."

"A schemer can always find a way," Goldfarb agreed. "You want to catch a schemer, think like a schemer."

Watching Raymond next day, thinking like a schemer turned my thoughts in a fresh direction. I needed more information on how the Elite's old-model cash registers worked. I went to the source—my friend Howie, who lives in my East Side apartment building and is a walking encyclopedia. Being an engineering student, he was a little technical, rattling off stuff about solenoids, gears, and contacts.

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But I got the idea. A way existed to finagle, based on what happens in the register's guts.

At the first opportunity the following day, I tripped accidentally on purpose against Raymond, slamming into him hard and knocking him against the register's metal corner. He let out a yelp and started hopping around. Hand pressed against his hip and grimacing with pain, he exclaimed angrily, "Klutz! Why don't you watch where you're going?"

"Sorry, Raymond," I apologized.

I'd found out what I wanted. He didn't carry a gun on the job, and his hip was sore from continually jamming it against the register. From favoring the tender hip, he'd thrown his leg out of kilter. That was why he limped. And the limp never got any better because he kept aggravating the hip misery by pushing it against the register. He had to have a damned good reason to keep doing something that was crippling him. I thought I knew what that reason was. And I was ready with a little scheme of my own.

Before running my test, I had to wait until he did his thing. According to my theory, he needed the right combination: someone with a sprinkling of groceries followed by someone with a cart filled sky-high. I took my break, smoking a cigarette at the front of the store, watching the checkouts. In due time, a slight, shabby old man came along, followed by a woman of about forty holding a nonchalant cigarette between fingers loaded with rings my jeweler's eye told me didn't come from Woolworth's. She was the victim, the pigeon, the kind of well heeled dame Raymond dreamed about, totally indifferent to the size and correctness of her bill.

I was out to latch onto the old man's register tape. His shopping cart held no frills, just easy-on-the-budget staples: bread from the reduced-for-quick-sale cart, peanut butter on special, cheese with a cents-off coupon, canned beans, a few potatoes, a little rice, and the half dozen cans of catfood that was almost standard with the elderly poor of the neighborhood, each of whom must own two or three cats.

His twelve dollars' worth took no more than a bag. When he left, I followed behind with a shopping cart. In the street, I swung the cart in front of him, blocking his way.

"May I have a minute of your time?" I said.

"What for?" He got a death hug on the bag and looked about ready to start hollering robbery.

"Relax, sir." I gave him my toothiest smile. "We're making a survey to see if the checkout clerks are doing their job satisfactorily.

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It'll only take a minute. I need to compare your purchases with the register tape, see that you have everything the tape shows and if the prices were rung up properly."

"They never did this before." He looked doubtful.

"Something new. A spot check, every tenth customer," I improvised. "For the inconvenience it may cause, we pay five dollars."

The sweetener worked like a charm. When I flashed the bill, his eyes lit up.

"I guess it'll be okay," he said.

I handed him the five, then emptied the bag and checked the items against the tape.

"Everything's just fine, sir," I smiled, replacing the items in the bag. "Mind if I keep the tape for my report?"

He shrugged. "What good is it to me?"

It meant zilch to him but I was tempted to kiss it. Thanks to Howie, I now had the handle to Raymond's modus operandi—and the innocent tape was, moreover, a valuable piece of evidence.

Just as I expected, the tape showed no total, only a subtotal which included sales tax. Checking the old man out, Raymond had held the register door open with his hip, so that no total appeared. He hit everything up as non-food and thus subject to sales tax. The wealthy customer's slip would have the subtotal included in her total, although the subtotal amount, hung up in the gears, would not be printed on her tape. On an order running a hundred dollars or more, the comparatively small subtotal amount would get swallowed up. Both frauds would go undetected, the one on her and the smaller one, the added-on sales tax charged to the little old cat lover who had to watch every penny—not that Raymond gave a damn about him.

At the end of the day, I watched Raymond very carefully while he counted the money in the till before Pete came around to close him out. A sheaf of bills in his hand, he edged some money wrappers onto the floor. While bent over to pick the wrappers up, he casually pulled up his socks. He was so slick I didn't catch the actual transfer of the bills.

To catch Raymond cold, I needed a reliable confederate. My father, Old Thunderfoot, was out of the question. His size, Sherman-tank walk, and especially his third-degree eyes would peg him as the detective he actually is, and scare Raymond off.

When I explained to my mother what I had in mind for her to do

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on Saturday, a day off from her nurse's job, she gave me a little smile. She knew I was working on a case.

"Ready for the kill, Lou?"

"How about it? You'd be perfect."

"How can I refuse my own son such a small favor?"

"There won't be any danger," I said. I'd ask Goldfarb to have Pete Moriarity playing watchdog. Old Thunderfoot was all set for patrol duty on the sidewalk in front of the Elite just in case my mother needed protection and also to handle another angle of the setup. In that neighborhood he wouldn't be conspicuous—just another loitering hulk.

To complete arrangements, I called on Howie, sketched the scenario, and asked his help.

"What the hell, Lou. I'm not doing anything special Saturday. Sounds like a ball."

"The guy won't be in on the deal," I cautioned. "He'll think you're for real. It could get physical."

"Don't worry." Howie flexed his muscles. "I'm into karate now."

"Don't be a show-off," I said. Besides being close to a genius, Howie is pretty big and strong.

Friday morning, earlier than usual, Pete passed out the pay envelopes. Raymond followed Eliondo to the break room. When Eliondo returned, he had the Friday glums, a sure sign the weekly back-alley shakedown had occurred.

"Cheer up, amigo," I told him privately. "Raymond won't be sucking your blood much longer."

"I've got to get out of here," he said. "Leave town, at least get another job."

"Hang on." I gave him an encouraging pat on the back. "Take my word. Your troubles are almost over."

"You ought to get another job." Eliondo almost smiled. "Giving pep talks."

Ten o'clock Saturday morning, Howie marched in, looking very brisk and important in jacket, dress shirt, and tie, and took command of a shopping cart. My father was already lumbering outside. Inside, near the door, Pete was pretending to be tidying up deposit bottles. I was bagging at Raymond's station. Eliondo, in the first aisle over from the produce department, was stamping prices on cereal boxes.

Howie wheeled his cart up to Eliondo. I saw Howie flip his jacket lapel to give Eliondo just a glimpse of the badge pinned there—

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probably a Junior G-man badge. He then seized Eliondo's arm as my alarmed amigo tried to escape. There was a little excitement. Twisting and turning, trying to break loose, Eliondo kept swinging his free arm at Howie, who managed to pin that arm and get hold of Eliondo in a bear hug. Eliondo was shouting in two languages for him to let go and attracting everyone's fascinated attention.

Pete went running to the scene of the commotion. By now Howie had Eliondo's arm twisted behind him and Eliondo was helpless. Howie said something to Pete and Pete nodded and got a grip on Eliondo's other arm.

Howie kept talking to Pete and Pete kept nodding as they hustled Eliondo out the door to where Old Thunderfoot was waiting to straighten Eliondo out on what was afoot.

Raymond watched open-mouthed as they went out the door. Everyone in the place, help and customers alike, was eating up the excitement, a passing sensation that would be forgotten in five minutes. Worse scenes were common in the neighborhood: purse snatchings, broad-daylight muggings, knifings, even shoot-outs.

"Did you see that?" I said to Raymond, going to the register to help bag. "They just picked up Eliondo. I wonder what for."

Raymond shrugged. "Who cares? It does my heart good to see a worm like that get nailed—a wetback."

"Wetback? That's a Mexican sneaking over the Rio Grande. Eliondo's no wetback. He's from Ecuador."

"Wetback, schmetback, he doesn't belong here. I hope he gets what's coming to him."

"How do you know he's an illegal?" I asked innocently.

"It's written all over him."

"Someone must have tipped them off," I said.

"It sure as hell wasn't me," he said.

"What'll happen to him now?"

"He'll get shipped back home. Good riddance."

"Well, if it happens, it happens," I said. "It's no skin off my nose."

He gave me an interested look, as if he liked what he was hearing but was surprised by it. "Maybe I've had you pegged wrong, Lou. Let's you and I have a little talk later. Maybe we can get together, do a little business."

"Sure," I smiled, thinking of the business I had in mind for him. "Why not? Just because we got off on the wrong foot doesn't mean we have to keep banging heads."

Ten minutes later my mother strolled in, pushing her own crazy-

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wheeled cart from home. I was still with Raymond. From up in his office, Goldfarb was keeping watch on the work floor. Pete, alerted by Goldfarb, was still futzing around, never straying far from the checkouts.

Working from a shopping list as long as her arm, my mother proceeded to attack the aisles, up one, down the next, piling up the goodies. Raymond eyed her the way a prospector eyes a chunk of gleaming yellow rock sticking out of a hillside. She was the pin-neat, prosperous housewife to a T.

She parked her bulging cart at the baked-goods display near Raymond's spot, biding her time. Raymond was busy with a woman with a fair load of groceries and behind her was a cart with about the same amount. Not the right setup for Raymond. So my mother did the indecisive bit, picking up and putting down various size packages of raisin bread. Then a young woman pushing a ten- or twelve-dollar load attached herself to the end of Raymond's line. Pay dirt for Raymond. He shifted into top gear, trying to lure my mother into his, the fastest-moving line. My mother squeezed a loaf of raisin bread into one of the cracks in Grocery Mountain, glanced up and down the checkouts, and took a place at the end of Raymond's line.

To be doubly sure of hauling my mother in, he stepped up his tempo still more, disposing of the two moderate loads in record time. The young woman before my mother got the treatment. Hip jammed against the side of the register door to hold it slightly open, Raymond tore off the slip and dumped it into the woman's bag. Goldfarb started down the office stairs.

My mother's stuff, heavy with canned goods, crowded the counter, but there was still plenty more in her cart. As Raymond whizzed through the ring-ups, she kept shoving stuff onto the belt. I had to hustle to keep up with him. He finished and let the register door clang shut. A total popped up in the register window. He handed my mother the slip. Her eyebrows went up.

"Read it and weep, lady—one hundred and thirteen dollars and seventy-three cents. That's what it comes to." Raymond stood expectantly.

My mother frowned, then made a gesture of helpless acceptance. Without another look at the tape, she dug into her handbag and forked over six twenty-dollar bills. Raymond made change while I finished bagging.

"Need any help, ma'am?" I said politely, packing the bags into her cart. "You've got quite a load here."

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"No thanks, young man." She smiled sweetly.

She struggled to keep the balky cart under control.

"At least let me help you outside with it," I said.

I manhandled the wobbly cart out the door and pushed it down the street until it was out of sight from inside the store.

Goldfarb was there, waiting to take over. He was talking to my father.

"How'd it go with Eliondo?" I asked.

"See for yourself." My father motioned toward the corner. Eliondo and Howie were standing there, eating pizza. Howie was showing Eliondo his badge. They were both laughing.

In Goldfarb's hand was the register tape from the woman who'd preceded my mother. I left him with my father, the two of them starting to examine my mother's tape.

Back inside, Raymond demanded, "Where the hell were you? Taking in a matinee at the Thalia around the corner? You want Goldfarb on your tail?"

"Who worries about Goldfarb?" I gave him my most innocent smile. "Goldfarb says we've gotta give the customers service."

"You believe that?" he smiled back, if you can call a sneer a smile. Without realizing it, he was idly rubbing his aching hip.

A minute later, Goldfarb strolled inside, surrounded as usual by a cloud of cigar smoke. The tapes were not in sight. "Close down," he told Raymond.

"What for?" Raymond looked mystified. "I'm checking out a customer."

"Finish with him, then close down. I want to talk to you."

Raymond checked out the customer, put up his CLOSED sign, and placed the chain across the checkout aisle while Goldfarb waited.

"Now what is it you want to talk about?" Raymond asked him.

"This." Goldfarb produced two register tapes from his pocket, a short one and my mother's monster. "Can you explain what this is all about?"

"Explain what?" Raymond's brow furrowed. He was toughing it out. "Is something wrong with them? Did I overcharge for something? Where'd they come from?"

"Listen to Mr. Innocent, Lou," Goldfarb turned a sour smile toward me.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," Raymond turned aggressive, his voice loud. "Are you accusing me of something? And what's this punk got to do with it?"

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"That's none of your business," Goldfarb said. "For starters, how come all the items on *this* slip—" he shoved the smaller slip under Raymond's nose "—are checked out non-food? Since when is broccoli non-food? Or cream cheese?"

"So I made a mistake!" Raymond fluffed it off. "Nobody's perfect!"

"Then you checked her out on a non-food subtotal. Why?"

"A mistake." Raymond gave me a nasty look. He was starting to squirm. The sight was magnificent.

"Lou," Goldfarb said, "you tell him why."

"Delighted, Mr. Goldfarb," I said. "Because he's a cheat and a thief. He's been robbing your good customers, chasing them away."

"How am I doing that?"

"Come on, Raymond, the party's over. That subtotal stays in the register's works and gets tacked onto the next customer's bill. The register only hits the total when the cash drawer goes all the way in. You hold the drawer open with your hip just enough so the little plug doesn't slide into the socket. It took me a while to catch on but that sore hip of yours gave you away."

Raymond laughed nervously. "You can't prove a thing. So I made a mistake *once*."

"Oh, no." Goldfarb shook his head. "How about this one from the other day?" He dug my spot-check register slip from his pocket. "Raymond, you're a dead duck. I don't want to see your ugly face around here any more. And you'll never pull off this stunt at any other market around this city because I'll see to it the word gets around. Consider yourself lucky. I've got half a mind to prosecute you."

"Another thing," I added. "In case you have any idea you'll get even by ratting on any illegals, just forget it. I'm wise to your little sideline racket, too. You turn anyone in and I'll see you get prosecuted for extortion."

"You listening?" Goldfarb said to Raymond.

Raymond wasn't listening. He was making a quick departure.

Bella, drinking it all in at the next register, yelled, "Where you going in such a hurry, lover boy? You got a hot date somewhere?"

"Okay, everyone, the show is over," Goldfarb bellowed. "Back to work."

I went out to the street. My mother was waiting at the curb for my father to pull the car around.

"Well, Mr. Detective, you're so smart, kindly let me know who's going to eat all this stuff?" she said.

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My father honked his horn from the curb.

"There's your answer," I said.

I helped load the trunk with the bags and put the overflow in the back seat. My mother got in front beside my father. I was halfway into the back seat when someone grabbed my shirt. It was Goldfarb.

"Whoa, Lou, where you off to so fast?"

"Home," I said. "Where else? The job's over. Mail my check."

Goldfarb held onto my shirt.

"I'm short-handed—stuck. You know how to run a register?"

"I'll give it a struggle," I said. "If you promise to see what you can do for Eliondo."

"As good as done."

At the end of the day he said, "Say, Lou, you wouldn't happen to be interested in switching to groceries, would you? I can use a smart boy like you."

"Sorry, Hymie," I said. "I'll stick with the jewelry."

DETECTIVERSE

SUPPLYING DEMAND

by SUSAN SUMNER

A hearse that sped by in bad weather
Smashed into a shop selling leather.
The shop clerk was killed—
But the driver seemed thrilled,
Saying, "Business has never been better!"

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a reprint "discovery" by

RAOUL WHITFIELD

Raoul Whitfield—American, raised in the Philippines, served in France in World War I, newspaper reporter and magazine writer, author of seven novels, a screenplay, and approximately 85 short stories (some published under the pseudonym Ramon Decolta). At one time considered Dashiell Hammett's peer, illness curtailed his activity and he died in 1945 at the age of 47.

The following poser is Mr. Whitfield's first published story. It appeared in the December 1922 issue of The Cauldron . . .

THE PIN

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

There was, Clyde Brule conceded, nothing vaguely indefinite about a pin. There were millions of them usefully scattered about the world accomplishing thousands of purposes. A tiny bit of steel, pointed at one end and slightly stubbed at the other. Carried behind the lapels of men's coats and in the purses of women and the pockets of children; strewn about the dressing tables in millions of homes, and put to every conceivable use.

And yet the whole world, this steady calm world of his, was being hurled madly about because of just such a definite object—a pin!

The first morning the thing had occurred, Brule had been slightly puzzled.

He was a thoroughly methodical man and his rooms at Mrs. Sand's very respectable establishment were always in systematized order. He knew where such-and-such a book could be found instantly. His papers, his ties, and even his toilet articles were placed in such a way as to insure perfect knowledge as to their availability. He might

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arise at night and without switching on the light put his hand directly on the desired object.

His rooms, consisting of a bedroom, living room, and bath, were of course scrupulously clean. His nature demanded this and there had never been a period in his life when the condition had not existed.

Thus, on awakening at precisely seven-thirty one Friday morning, he was considerably puzzled and finally thoroughly amused, after the inevitable annoyment, at the discovery of a glittering pin lying on the carpet a short distance from his bed.

A small incident indeed, this half inch bit of stubbed and pointed steel, but an unusual one in the steady existence of Clyde Brule.

He mused over the incident. It had not, he knew, been there the night before when he had retired. It was an unfailing habit of his to sit on the bed in night attire, and just before he was ready for sleep turn over in his mind the events of the past day. This was but another effect of his exacting nature. On these occasions his eyes would trace the pattern, the indefinable windings of the intricate design, of the carpet. Therefore, he reasoned, he must surely have noticed the pin had it lain there the previous night. Throughout the day, the memory of the affair kept recurring in his mind. He was not easily satisfied with the thought that the pin might have fallen from his clothes.

The day, not being a particularly busy one for him at the office, gave little opportunity of forgetfulness and the incident so affected him that he remembered it for several days. But by the middle of the following week things were going smoothly again. It was, then, with a decided shock that he awakened on Friday morning to find, in about the same position it had lain a week ago, another pin, glittering brightly in the sun that shone in through the window.

Dressing, he puzzled and fretted over the happening. He remembered, only at the moment he was about to leave the house, that the pin had appeared the first time on the preceding Friday. The fact startled him. There was a significance beyond mere coincidence here. Yet what could it be?

The point remained that before he switched off the lights and got into bed the carpet was bare. In the morning, when he awoke, there lay the glittering bit of steel. It was no illusion. It was fact. Plain, unexplainable fact!

Naturally a rather quiet man, Brule told no one of the affair. He felt a strong desire to talk to someone about it, but realized too well

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the amusement the story would afford the listener. Who would be concerned over such a minute and trivial incident as that of a pin found on the floor? They would tell him it had fallen from his clothes and it was but a coincidence that it dropped in the same place on a similar day of another week.

Clyde Brule was not weak-minded. He was aware that things were transported naturally from place to place. But the more he thought of the past events the more disturbed he became. He wanted a solution to the problem, that he might get back into the old order of things. Pins, he knew, did not push themselves up through heavy carpets. That night he looked under the edge of the carpet nearest where the pin appeared. He found nothing; had not expected to find anything, but felt somewhat more satisfied.

He looked intently at the spot near which the disturbing factor had rested. It was devoid of any object, spotless, clean, and glowing in the dull glare of the light. And then he pressed the button beside his bed and plunged the room into darkness.

Sleep, however, he found an impossibility. His brain was filled with endless thought concerning pins. Once, hours later, he arose and switched on the lights. But the carpet was bare. After that he managed to sleep restlessly, tossing about in vague, fearful nightmare. And always there were surrounding him—pins! Glittering, evil pins!

The first light of morning shining in through his window awoke him no more rested than if he had walked the streets of the city all night. He rolled over grimly, away from the glaring light, and gazed at the carpet.

There, resting in precisely the same position as the Friday before, lay a pin—shining brightly in the sun!

Clyde Brule completely lost control of himself. He was still lying across the disordered bed, sobbing hysterically, when Mrs. Sands, disturbed by his cries, returned with the doctor from across the street.

This was the beginning of the losing fight put up by Brule. There is a vast difference between the forces of youth and age. Brule was sixty-two and of an extremely sensitive nature. All his life had been spent among well ordered events. The few disturbing factors that had arisen had almost as quickly been discovered and eliminated.

If Brule had been a young man, he would have laughed at the object on the floor, perhaps never even have noticed it. Pins were simply pins. If they fell on the floor, they lay there or were picked

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up and forgotten. What matter how they came there? They were dead, inanimate things—useful to be sure, but hardly possessing the power to awaken emotions in one.

Youth, however, is youth—and age may never intrude upon its careless ease and possibility of absorption. So when another Friday's dawn came and the light disclosed to the feeble eyes of Brule another bit of glittering steel on the carpet, he shrieked and hid his face within the coverings of the bed. And that night he died!

The doctor seemed only slightly surprised at his passing. He shook his head thoughtfully. "A nervous breakdown at his age is a hard thing to beat," he told Mrs. Sands, as if in self defense.

But Mrs. Sands could not understand.

"His living conditions were so perfect," she said tremulously. "He never worried about anything and always seemed so happy."

The doctor nodded his head wisely. "This perfect planning and absolute routine is a bad thing," he answered. "It takes such a little incident to upset the life of a man of his age who has always been sheltered from the unusual."

His eyes fell upon the pin lying near his feet. He pushed it under the bed bearing the stilled form of Clyde Brule with his foot. It annoyed him for a moment. But the doctor was young.

Upstairs, in the room above the one Clyde Brule occupied, Mrs. Tyler conversed with her sister in low tones. "Do you know," she said, "Claire's little girl stays with me on Thursday nights while Claire visits her mother in Edgewood. She's such a darling child and just at that inventive age. Why, do you know, I awoke this morning very early and caught her just as she was dropping a pin down that open space alongside of the steam pipe. I must have the carpenter fix it. She told me she'd done the same thing other mornings she's been here. Imagine that—what a silly preoccupation."

"Oh, a child of her age will do those things," commented Mrs. Tyler's sister. "She was probably slept out."

"You don't suppose it might have annoyed Mr. Brule?" asked Mrs. Tyler.

"What, such a simple thing as that?" replied her sister. "Why," she added disdainfully, "a little thing like a pin wouldn't bother anybody!"

Down below, in the room with the drawn shades, the pin lay gleaming faintly in the dark beneath the bed where the doctor's foot had placed it.

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a *NEW* Grijpstra-de Gier story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

"I was just thinking," said de Gier. "Remember those yellow-plastic things, like boxes? Between the body and the aquariums—piled up on the floor?"

"I was sitting on them," said Grijpstra. "What about the boxes?"

"They just didn't fit in—that loud yellow in the middle of all that peaceful green."

Grijpstra pushed away the empty coffee cup. "Since when do you see colors? I'm *the painter, not you."*

"Nasty, cheap yellow," said de Gier. "Commercial. It just doesn't go with the beautiful clean white sand and the deep-green plants and those blue-black mussels swaying open and shut so sadly . . ."

HOUSEFUL OF MUSSELS

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

"One dead professor," the voice came over the telephone. "Right up your alley—a bit of a shame for the dead guy, though."

Adjutant Grijpstra tried to claw his way up from the mists of sleep. "Whuh?"

"Where? He lives—well, I mean he *lived* at 143 Leidsekade. Isn't that near you?"

"Mmm."

"Are you in bed? It's only ten to eleven."

"Busy day," Grijpstra mumbled. "I'm tired. I just fell asleep. I'm off duty." He woke up a bit more. "Call Sergeant de Gier—he's on duty."

"He's halfway there by now, Adjutant. The Commissioner said

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both of you, because the dead guy's a professor. I guess that makes it more complicated."

"On my way." Grijpstra cradled the receiver. He looked angry. "Bah," he said.

"Now what?" the adjutant asked his dark-blue three-piece suit as he carefully buttoned the jacket, his comb as he pulled it through his bristly grey hair, his pistol, as he stuffed it with some difficulty into the holster on his belt.

"Suicide," he predicted, strolling beneath the trees that filtered the moonlight along his street, the Lijnbaanskade, inner city, Amsterdam. Ducks in the canal by his side, hoping he was there to feed them, quacked encouragingly. Budding branches waved gently in the evening breeze.

Professors worry too much, he thought. They're afraid the world's going all to hell. They're probably right, too—but thank God we ordinary dummies don't see things quite so clearly. He was worried, it was all too much for him—just let it be that simple, then *this* dummy can get back to bed by midnight. I outrank de Gier—he can write up the suicide report without me.

Crossing the Raamplein, Grijpstra tripped over a dachshund lifting its leg by an elm. The animal was so low to the ground it was almost completely hidden by the weeds. The adjutant managed to stay on his feet, but he was sweating when he reached the Leidsekade.

The dead man's house was unmistakable: the revolving blue lights of the two patrol cars parked out front rhythmically swept across the crowd gathered on the sidewalk. Grijpstra shoved through the knot of bloodthirsty spectators and climbed the stone steps to the green front door. The patrolmen on guard touched their caps to him.

"Suicide?" asked Grijpstra pleasantly.

"Murder, Adjutant."

He frowned. "How do you know?"

"He was shot in the forehead, but there's no weapon in the house. Neighbor lady heard the shot at 10:30 and phoned in immediately. We were here five minutes later."

"Quick." Grijpstra nodded. "Anyone seen leaving the house?"

"No, Adjutant."

"How did you get in?"

"Neighbor lady had a key."

"No sobbing wife or girl friend on hand?"

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"No, Adjutant, nothing but a houseful of mussels."

"Mussels?"

"Mussels. Thousands of them, in aquariums. Everywhere, even in the bathroom. Green lamps lighting up the tanks, airpumps bubbling, those little shells opening and closing. Scary, you know?"

"Sergeant de Gier inside?"

"Yes, Adjutant."

"And the photographers and fingerprint men?"

"They should be here any minute."

Grijpstra read the name painted on the door in intricate script letters: Hans van der Stroom.

"Professor of musselology," said the informative patrolman. The other one smiled helpfully.

"Mussels," said Grijpstra. "I can't afford to eat them any more. Too expensive."

"Had to happen," said the silent patrolman, opening his mouth for the first time. "Now that professors are messing around with them. Professors make big money, and it's got to come from somewhere."

The door opened. Rinus de Gier was standing in the hallway. He was a large man, broad-shouldered but with a narrow waist. He wore stylishly tailored casual clothing and a silk scarf arranged carefully around his neck. His curly hair shone softly and his moustache was neatly brushed as usual. High cheekbones pushed his warm brown eyes upward. It would have been difficult for a stranger to have guessed his age correctly, but Grijpstra knew that he was forty-two. Grijpstra himself was ten years older. De Gier didn't have a steady girl friend at the moment—Grijpstra was separated from his wife. De Gier was still searching for happiness, Grijpstra was no longer interested.

"Well?" the adjutant asked.

"Well," said de Gier. "The man's dead." He pointed behind him.

Grijpstra walked past him and through the indicated doorway. "Oh, Christ." He bent over, hands on his back. "Laid out pretty, isn't he? Face up, mouth closed, eyes open." He spoke loudly to make himself heard over the bubbling of the large glass tanks ranged along the walls. "That light is terrible."

"Green," said de Gier. "For the plants. The mussels eat them. This is a shellfish farm, financed by the government. The professor was an oceanographer. He lived here, shared the place with the critters."

"And that?" asked Grijpstra. "A television set?"

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"Computer, Adjutant."

"Do all those ugly little numbers mean anything?"

"It's a recipe," said de Gier. "For adding supplementary nutrients to the water in the tanks."

"Let's hear it from the top," said Grijpstra, sitting on a pile of yellow-plastic boxes.

"A neighbor was here when I arrived. She lives next door and heard the shot. She called the police first, then came over to take a look around. An old lady. She was shocked by the professor's—ah, appearance. She's gone back home to take a valium for her nerves."

"Suspect?"

"Uh-uh."

"Why'd she have a key?"

"She took care of the critters when the professor was away. He did a lot of traveling. The heaters in the aquariums needed to be adjusted from time to time, that sort of thing."

"Good-looking man," said Grijpstra, looking down at the body. "Nice beard. Great tan. Athletic."

"Comes from the scuba diving." De Gier wrapped a handkerchief around his hand and opened a closet door. "See? Wet suit, regulator, tanks. Scuba diving's a healthy sport. The professor was thirty-nine—his passport's there on the desk. Single and living alone, according to the neighbor, but with two regular female visitors. They always came by separately."

"Know who they are?"

De Gier pulled out a notepad. "Bakini Khan, a student—young. And Truus Vermeulen, doctor of oceanography, a colleague of the good professor's, much older than Bakini."

"Addresses? Phone numbers?"

"Known. They both live right here in the neighborhood."

"Maybe we're already getting somewhere," said Grijpstra, stroking his chin. "Listen: there were voices arguing just before the shot, one male and one female. Right?"

"Wrong. That is, there *may* have been, but the neighbor didn't hear them. Just one abrupt explosion and the front door slamming. I know what you're driving at. Bakini Khan—a beautiful name, don't you think?—an exotic young creature, the neighbor lady said so herself, though women don't often see each other as exotic. So Professor Hans van der Stroom here—" de Gier nodded at the corpse "—and the oriental beauty used each other's bodies to satisfy their mutual lust. Let's say a tender love developed between them. Why

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not? But then it soured. The bottom line was that the professor preferred his shellfish. Bakini grew more and more jealous of the little critters, and tonight she decided to make the professor an offer he couldn't refuse. She threatened him, with a gun. But the professor, a slave to his scientific pursuits, refused her after all. Bang!"

Grijpstra squatted next to the dead man. "Classic," he said. "A real murder wound. You don't see them like this any more. They just keep right on firing these days, one shot after another. That's what you get with an automatic weapon: waste. Remember that Chinese not too long ago? Sixteen bullets. Ripped him to shreds without hitting a single vital organ. He died from loss of blood."

De Gier hunkered down at Grijpstra's side. "You're right. This was a clean bull's-eye, though. Ten points and a Cuban cigar for the murderer. He doesn't look very professorial, does he?"

"Looks more like a pirate," Grijpstra agreed, "with that one gold earring. Women love pirates, you know. Pirates are cool and indifferent. Women love that."

"Love," said de Gier. "That's what *I* was thinking. I'm still thinking it. The professor played around with the ladies, but that's not as easy as it used to be. They're all liberated now—they won't stand for being treated badly. He was killed by a woman, don't you think?"

"Well?" asked one of the gentlemen in the hallway, leaning in at the open door. "May we join you? Or are you still sleuthing?"

"Come in," said Grijpstra, "and help us find the cartridge case before somebody trips over it. It's got to be here somewhere, and Ballistics will want to see it. Everybody look around."

"Here," someone said, pointing with a video camera.

Grijpstra picked the object up with the end of a ballpoint pen and put it away in a little plastic envelope. He handed the envelope over to the cameraman. "Will you drop this off at the weapons room when you're finished here?"

"Thirty-eight caliber," said de Gier. "Probably a pistol, then. Small model, just right for a jacket pocket or a handbag. Shall we go make some phone calls? I've got the numbers of the two ladies we were discussing. If we hang around here we'll just be in the way."

"One second," said Grijpstra. "Anybody have a Polaroid? A decent one? I want a picture of the body. The gruesomer the better."

A flashbulb popped, and the snapshot developed itself on the adjutant's outstretched palm. "Lovely. Thanks. You can even see the blood that poured from the wound, and from his nose and mouth. See you . . ."

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Grijpstra telephoned from a café while de Gier drank coffee and drew diagonal lines on a paper napkin. Line one was a dead professor named Hans van der Stroom. Line two was an unknown but certainly large number of mussels. Line three was an exotic young woman, one Bakini. Line four was another woman, not exotic, Truus by name. The pistol didn't get a line of its own, it was a mere extension connecting the arm of the killer to the body of the victim. What else, then? A line for an eventual other party? That could always be added on later if it turned out to be necessary. Anything else?

"Miss Khan?" Grijpstra asked the mouthpiece in his hand. "I'm sorry to bother you so late. I'm with the police—Adjutant Grijpstra, Homicide. Something terrible has happened, and my colleague and I would like to ask you some questions. May we drop by? We're here in the neighborhood."

"So," Grijpstra said a few moments later, "you didn't order me a coffee? That's all right, I'll finish yours for you. Ah, that's good coffee—thanks. The Derde Looiers Dwarsstraat, that's right near here. We can walk, a nice warm evening like this." He sat back and chuckled.

"Having fun?" asked de Gier.

"No."

"I was just thinking," said de Gier. "Remember those yellow-plastic things, like boxes? Between the body and the aquariums—piled up on the floor?"

"I was sitting on them," said Grijpstra. "What about the boxes?"

"How do I know, Adjutant? I don't know anything. But they just didn't fit in—that loud yellow in the middle of all that peaceful green."

Grijpstra pushed away the empty coffee cup. "Since when do you see colors? *I'm* the painter, not you."

"Nasty, cheap yellow," said de Gier. "Commercial. It just doesn't go with the beautiful clean white sand and the deep-green plants and those blue-black mussels swaying open and shut so sadly."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious," said de Gier dreamily. "There were Chinese characters printed on the sides of those nasty yellow boxes. And the neighbor lady told me the professor was just back from a trip to Taiwan."

"You think those boxes had something to do with his death?"

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"Do *I* think, Adjutant? I never think. But I noticed them, the contrast with the rest of the apartment, and when you investigate a crime you always have to look out for contrasts. A junkie dressed in rags, driving a Rolls-Royce. I stopped one like that once, and he turned out to be no good. A fancy society lady running barefoot down a dark alley. Remember? She was up to no good, too."

"Boxes," said Grijpstra. "What do I care about boxes?"

"Forget it." De Gier stood up. "Ready?"

On the way, Grijpstra muttered something unintelligible under his breath.

"The adjutant mumbled?" said de Gier.

"You know what we are?" Grijpstra demanded, louder now. "I've been thinking about this lately, now that I'm getting older and more aware of my ways. We're ghouls. And what's worse is we *like* being ghouls. I was just imagining that exotic beauty pacing restlessly around her little apartment, waiting for us. I frightened her, you know. On purpose.

" 'Something *terrible* has happened,' I told her. 'I'm from *Homicide,* miss.' I said it to make her nervous. I'm the big bad wolf out of a child's nightmare, slinking around drooling at all hours of the night, inflicting my evil presence on the innocent."

"Is Bakini Khan innocent, then?"

"Naturally," said Grijpstra. "Why would a dear little student put a bullet through her own professor's loving head? No matter what the bastard put her through. No matter how he made her abase herself just to get a B in his course."

"Now you mention it," said de Gier, "that body did look pretty unpleasant. A sinister, egocentric man—and I'm not just saying that because he was lying there covered with blood. If that dear little angel of yours really did kill him, it was probably all our fault anyway. In this degenerate society of ours, authority gets less respect every day. People start protecting themselves instead of standing back and letting us take care of it, and we don't help any when we spend more time harassing the innocent than going after the guilty."

Grijpstra stumbled. "That damn dachshund again! Has it got kidney trouble, or what?"

De Gier grabbed at his superior's arm and kept him from falling. "Nasty yellow boxes," he said. "What do you think they were for?"

"Here," said Grijpstra, ringing a doorbell. The door swung open and a young woman stood before them. She was in her early twenties, with doe eyes and long black hair that cascaded down her slender

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shoulders. She wore a nightgown of batiked cloth draped around her like a sarong. Her legs were brown and shapely, her feet bare.

"Miss Bakini?" asked Grijpstra.

She nodded.

"Adjutant Grijpstra," he said.

De Gier held up his police card. "Detectives, miss. I'm Rinus de Gier."

And I'm having fun, he thought, walking up the stairs behind Bakini Khan. Crime is usually ugly. The suspects make it all so confusing, and we have to run around cleaning up the mess and setting things in order. Holding our noses and trying to keep from puking. Surrounded by the screams of deformed humanity, monsters escaped from a cavernous hell. But look at *this* for a change. Not only is the suspect apparently normal, she's much more than that. A lovely apparition from the heavens of the Orient, living in tasteful surroundings that suit me amazingly well.

"Tea?" Bakini asked them. She poured the steaming liquid from a copper teapot into small porcelain cups without handles. "I haven't got any milk or sugar, I'm afraid, but it's jasmine tea. I hope it's all right. Do you mind sitting on pillows on the floor? I haven't got any chairs."

She doesn't even ask what's happened, thought de Gier. She's very polite. The peaceful patience of the truly civilized being. We come clomping in here to use her for our own low purposes. We're cops—all we do is run around slapping handcuffs on poor defenseless citizens. She knows that, yet she's still polite. Admirable—and clever, too, because not even the lowest devil could resist such friendliness. He glanced at the stick of incense smoldering in an earthenware bowl on a low table. There was an aquarium on the table, too, in which a dozen mussels clapped their shells open and shut, silently filtering food from the water. Bakini sat before the table, her legs crossed and hidden beneath the fold of the sarong.

"Delicious tea," said Grijpstra.

Bakini nodded.

"What a lovely apartment," said de Gier, looking at the small Buddha which ruled the room from the mantelpiece.

Bakini smiled.

"Professor Hans van der Stroom," said Grijpstra. "Did you know him well?"

"Is he dead?"

"Yes," said de Gier. "He was shot in the head earlier this evening."

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Bakini was silent.

That's good, thought de Gier. Orientals know exactly how to react. I shrink into myself when I hear something awful, but she just sits there. I wave my hands in shock, she folds hers together calmly. My eyes go wide, she half closes hers. The smell of the incense fits right in, and the soft bubbling of the aquarium, too.

Now what? the adjutant asked himself. Got to keep the conversation going. "Are you from Indonesia?"

Bakini's long eyelashes lifted slightly. "I am Pakistani, though I was born in Surinam. I graduated from high school here, and have spent the last two years studying with Professor van der Stroom. I knew Hans well. I worked with him at the breeding station in Zeeland and I helped him with his experiments at home. I was in several of his classes at the university. We traveled together, to the mussel farms in Karachi."

"Not to Taiwan?" asked de Gier.

"No. Miss Vermeulen went to Taiwan with him. She usually accompanied him on his trips. The professor traveled a great deal."

"But now suddenly he's dead. Murdered, no less. Don't you think that's terrible?"

"I think it's terrible." Her voice vibrated slightly, and its quivering sent pleasant shivers down de Gier's spine.

"You're so calm," said Grijpstra. "As if you were expecting van der Stroom's death."

Bakini bowed her head. "I am a scientist. Death is a part of life. One flows from the other. Neither can exist without the other."

De Gier let his voice turn cold. "I see. Were you at home this evening?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I spoke with Hans. He called me. He wanted me to come by, but I didn't go."

"May I ask you something?" said Grijpstra.

She raised her head. "Yes, we had an affair."

"Exactly. But why do you say 'had' instead of 'were having'?"

"I put a stop to it."

"Ah. Long ago?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday," Grijpstra repeated. "Why?"

Bakini stood up in one supple movement, without touching the floor with her hands. "More tea?" The detectives held their cups up

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to her respectfully while she poured. "I ended our sexual relationship because I thought Hans had become too greedy. Scientists are supposed to serve humanity. The world is three-fourths water, you know—the oceans are rich enough to feed all mankind if managed intelligently. But we are depleting them instead. Less food is available every year. As scientists, our job is to reverse that tendency. Our work is not merely interesting—it is of the highest importance."

"Yes?" asked de Gier. "And the good professor was not serving humanity?"

"No." Bakini set the teapot back on its stand, beneath which a candle burned to keep it warm. "As a professor, Hans got paid quite well. But he was never satisfied. He bought cheap mussel larvae in Karachi and sold them here for a large profit—he had his own little company, independent of the university. When he came back from Taiwan he brought a new sort of hatching box with him—they manufacture them over there, and he'd managed to get exclusive distribution rights for all of Western Europe for his company."

"Good boxes, are they?"

"Very good." The woman hesitated briefly. "How should I address you?"

"As Rinus, if you like."

"Very good boxes, Rinus. They may double the yield of the local cultures. But Hans had no right to make a profit off that. That would have made him a thief."

"And you wouldn't have wanted to go on working with a thief?" asked Grijpstra.

Bakini ignored the adjutant's insistent tone. "I would continue to work with him, yes. He is my teacher. I would continue that relationship, but I would never go to bed with him again."

"You're using the wrong tense, you know. The professor is dead."

She shook her head. "As a scientist, I have my doubts about the linear essence of time. Have you read Einstein?"

"That man with the relativity, you mean?"

"All science," said Bakini, "begins and ends with experience. I have experienced a great deal through knowing Hans. That remains with me." She smiled at him. "For a while, anyway."

"Another question," said de Gier. "Are you a good shot?"

"Yes."

"With a pistol?"

"With a speargun."

"Under water, is that what you're saying?"

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"I often work under water."

"What time did the professor call you?" Grijpstra put in.

She looked at the numbers on the digital clock in Buddha's shadow. "Around ten, I think."

Grijpstra pulled the Polaroid picture from his pocket and showed it to her. "Van der Stroom died about ten-thirty."

She sat down, holding the photo tightly with both hands. Then she bent forward and touched the snapshot to her forehead. "Poor Hans."

"Did the professor have other affairs?" asked Grijpstra.

She gazed at him silently. "I'm sure he didn't. He was very constant."

"Do you know his political affiliation?"

"Labor Party, just like me. But he was betraying the people."

De Gier, sitting with his legs crossed, felt his foot beginning to cramp. He stretched both legs out on the rush matting which covered the floor. "You know," he said slowly, "in some countries crimes against the people are punishable by death. —What sort of fish do you shoot at under water?"

"Sharks. Sharks are dangerous, and there are too many of them. They disrupt the balance of the ocean."

"Wasn't Hans a shark of sorts?" asked Grijpstra.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, he was."

"Wasn't it your job, then, to shoot him?"

Her soft eyes glittered. "I believe in democratic socialism, gentlemen, not in anarchy. To avoid the misuse of power, those charged with enforcing the laws in a democratic country are responsible to a freely elected government. Your society here in Holland is not fully mature—but it is gradually evolving towards a day when egocentric practices like Hans' will no longer be possible. I can wait for that day without taking the law into my own hands. I have patience."

"Loveable, but at the same time cold," said Grijpstra when they were back out in the street. "An unusual combination."

De Gier seemed far away, and the adjutant pounded irritably on his arm.

"Hello?"

"Hello there," de Gier murmured.

"What now?"

"Now for the other one, wouldn't you say? Shall we call first?"

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"Call from where? There's no booth around here and the cafés are all closed by now."

De Gier checked his notepad. "Let's take her by surprise. Ambush her. Okay?"

"Korte Leidsedwarsstraat," said Grijpstra a while later. "Both ladies living within a ten-minute walk from the victim's house. Suspicious, eh?"

"Very suspicious, I'd say. And my intuition's running well tonight. I was right about those nasty yellow boxes."

Grijpstra rang the bell.

"Go away," scowled the woman who opened the door to them. "Whatever it is you're selling, I'm not interested. You're just lucky I'm not boiling oil right now—if I was, you'd both have a face full of it. What do you want?"

"Police," said Grijpstra. "Here's my identification. Professor van der Stroom was murdered earlier this evening and we'd like to ask you some questions."

The woman was in her thirties, not unattractive but heavily built. She seemed unsurprised at their news. "Am I a suspect? What if I refuse to let you in?"

"We'll go get a warrant," Grijpstra said cheerfully, "and be right back."

Inside, seated on a straight-backed chair at the bare kitchen table under a white ceiling and a fluorescent light fixture, Grijpstra elaborated further. "Professor van der Stroom was shot to death at about ten-thirty," he said. "With a—may I use your phone?"

"With a Walther PPK," said a voice in the weapons room at police headquarters. "All the kids are packing them this season. Red Gijs brought almost a thousand of them across the border before we caught up with him, and the whole inner city's armed with them by now. A precise piece of armament, Adjutant. Practical, reliable, small, and handy."

"With a Walther PPK pistol," Grijpstra repeated, hanging up the telephone.

"So?" asked Truus Vermeulen.

"Your colleague is dead," said de Gier. "You were just in Taiwan with him. Doesn't his murder make you sad?"

"Why should it? We'll have a new professor by noon tomorrow. There are plenty of professors around. Too many, if you want my opinion. Shooting one lousy specimen'll hardly help solve the problem at all."

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"You may wind up being his replacement yourself, isn't that true? You were his number one assistant, I understand."

Truus rested her chin on her hands and looked at the detectives impudently, her clear blue eyes half hidden behind luxuriant blonde hair. "Are you trying to manufacture a motive, officer? Yes, I could wind up replacing Hans, except the people who hand out the professorships are all men, and they might be just a *little* biased against a woman."

It was quiet in the cool room. Truus stood up. "How about some mussels, boys? I've got a pot in the oven. Tasty, with plenty of herbs and spices. It's part of my job, you know, developing new recipes. We're thinking in various directions, including marketing of course, and the better we can get them to taste the better they'll sell."

She handed each of them a plate and a fork, and ladled mussels from a tall brown ovensafe crockpot.

"Glass of wine? I've got a white Beaujolais—a little heady but nice with shellfish."

"We're on duty," said Grijpstra.

"I'll help myself, then." She filled an enamel mug from a large carafe.

"Delicious," said de Gier. "Terrific mussels."

Truus topped off her mug. "You don't know what you're missing here. This is an excellent wine."

"Do you live alone?" asked Grijpstra.

"Cheers," said Truus. "Here's to poor dead Hans. Yes, I live alone. I don't need anyone else, certainly not anyone of *your* sex. Let's knock off *all* the men, that's what I say. The only real problem with the world is overpopulation, anyway. If you'd all just up and go to hell, I could quit my job and take it easy. There'd by plenty of food left over to take care of all the women."

"Knock off all men?" de Gier repeated. "Wouldn't that be the end of the world, then? After one generation, I mean?"

Truus filled her mug. She drank deeply and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "Dumb cop. Haven't you ever heard of cloning? We're making real progress there, you know. Every human cell carries the complete genetic code inside it. Sooner or later we'll get the technology down and be able to duplicate ourselves asexually. What a revolution that'll be for women: when your body gets old, just grow yourself a new one and throw the old one away."

"Interesting," said Grijpstra. "And where was *your* body at ten-thirty this evening?"

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"Here, alone. Baking mussels. Which you are now gorging yourself on."

De Gier looked around. "Do you shell them yourself?"

Truus studied her empty bottle. "Gone already? I'll go grab another one. Be right back."

She returned almost immediately. The corkscrew half powdered the cork—Truus filled her glass and drank, spitting the cork crumbs to one side. "No, I don't shell them myself. Hans' company does that. They sell their surplus to the fish shop on the corner here. He's a very clever businessman, our well educated little sneak."

"*Was,* miss. The professor's dead."

Truus nodded at Grijpstra. "Was. I'll have to get used to that. Or are you two just joshing me?"

Grijpstra pushed the Polaroid snapshot across the table to her.

"Well, well, well," said Truus, looking at it. "Lots of blood, huh? Not bad." She pointed at the pile of yellow-plastic boxes next to the body. "And there's his fancy new line of merchandise. A lot of good it'll do him now."

"Do you have any idea who might have wanted to shoot the professor?"

"Might," said Truus. "And have. And wanted. And shoot. What a mess of verbs. The Chinese, maybe?"

"The Chinese?"

"Sure. Because of the boxes. Hans conned them into giving him exclusive marketing rights on them, but you can take my word for it: those things'll practically sell themselves. Let a breeder get one look at them and he'll snap up a thousand of them in five seconds. They're a gold mine, those boxes—and maybe the Chinese decided they wanted their marketing rights back."

"Sounds like you're mixing up mussel men and heroin dealers," said de Gier.

"You're the one who's mixed up." Truus raised her glass. "Here's to the decline and fall of capitalism! With Hans gone, that's one less bloodsucker the rest of us have got to worry about." She set down her glass and jabbed a clenched fist at the ceiling. "Up the proletariat!"

Grijpstra peered inside the tall brown crockpot.

"Still hungry?" asked Truus. "Help yourself, officer, that's what they're there for. I'm going to grab another bottle."

"Think she's really a Communist?" de Gier wondered while she was gone.

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"I think she's really a nut case," said Grijpstra, "and if we get lucky maybe she'll get so plastered she'll let us know what's really on her mind."

Truus came back with a full bottle held carefully in both hands. "Enjoying yourselves, gents?" She sat down and stared ahead glassily.

"I think our hostess is nervous," Grijpstra went on. "But why should she be nervous? Because she doesn't have an alibi for this evening, perhaps?"

"I don't need an alibi," said Truus. "What do I need an alibi for? I was home. Here. I live here, remember?"

"You could be right," de Gier nodded. "She knew the professor—intimately, so to speak. Did a lot of traveling with him. You get to know each other pretty well, working side by side like that."

"Right," said Truus, "side by side. Listen, when a man and a woman are working together, it's the woman who winds up doing all the work, you can bet on that."

"Spending tender nights in their hotel room together," proposed de Gier.

Truus laughed explosively.

"I had my own room everywhere we went. Hans only got to knock on my door, not on me."

"Jealousy?" asked Grijpstra. "The professor's student, you mean? What was her name again? Bakini?"

Truus emptied her mug and tried to stare Grijpstra down, but her eyes wandered randomly in their sockets. Grijpstra shot a glance at de Gier.

The sergeant slid the photograph back across the table. "Look, the professor isn't all that appetizing here, but he must have been a handsome enough man when he was alive, with his muscular body and his handsome face. Brilliant, too—an authority in his field. The suspect admired him—worshipped him, let's say."

Grijpstra nodded sadly. "But her love went unrequited."

"What are you talking about?" Truus demanded shrilly. "Me? In love with a *man?* Is this some kind of comedy routine, or what?"

"Truus wanted to get married," said de Gier.

"Have some more mussels," said Truus.

"No, thank you, miss."

"Come on, the pot's still practically full."

De Gier patted his stomach. "No, really, miss. They're delicious,

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it's not that—I'm just too full." He turned back to Grijpstra. "A woman scorned," he said.

Truus pounded the table angrily. Mug and bottles danced, forks clattered on their plates. "Are you accusing me?" she stormed. "Just like that, without any proof?"

"We're just thinking out loud, miss," Grijpstra reproved her.

"Jealousy," she said, bitter. "Can't you men think of any motive but sex? What about moral outrage? What about *that?* What are you supposed to do with a swindler like Hans, *tolerate* him?"

"Sure, that's her story now," said Grijpstra to de Gier. "But I don't believe a word of it. Maybe she just didn't recognize her own sexual urges at first. You ask me, she just up and let him have it in a fit of passion. It probably wasn't even murder. After all, she lives right nearby. She drops by to see him, something happens, and the gun goes off."

"Manslaughter," said de Gier. "A crime of impulse."

"We see it so often," said Grijpstra. "Feminine frustration leading to hysterical behavior. Truus was crazy about the professor, but he had the hots for Bakini."

"Life is cruel," de Gier sighed.

"You boys look worn out," said Truus. "Have yourselves some more mussels, I'll take another drink, and then we'll all have something to do."

"She sure can hold her liquor," said de Gier. "An ordinary mortal would be under the table after two bottles of Beaujolais, but here's our Truus working her way right through number three."

"Still completely sober—" Truus smiled "—and following your so-called reasoning closely." Her right hand stroked the spines of a stack of books by her side. "I'm a very matter-of-fact person, you know. Do you recognize these? Crime novels. I borrowed them from Hans. Hard-boiled stuff, but fairly useful."

Grijpstra stood up suddenly. "An illuminating remark."

"Really?" Truus pursed her lips in a pout. "So you figure you've got motive and opportunity all lined up, then, right? What's next? Means? Where's the murder weapon, fellas?"

"Please, miss, not so fast. We're not as quick as a sub-professor. You must have left *some* traces in the apartment?"

Truus burst out laughing. She closed one eye and peered at them through the other. "Playing cops and robbers, are we? Listen, my fingerprints are all over Hans' place, you know that. I work there."

"She's got one eye shut," said Grijpstra. "She's tight, all right. But

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who gets drunk during a police interrogation? Point for her, Sergeant, wouldn't you say? Could she be innocent after all?"

De Gier looked at his empty plate. "No, Adjutant. *Une crime passionnelle*. My manslaughter theory looks better all the time. If she'd killed him with malice aforethought, if this was murder we were dealing with, she wouldn't be drinking so much. But there's a very violent emotion at work here."

"*Crime* is masculine," said Truus heavily, "so it's *un*, not *une*. Although I'm pleasantly surprised you know any French at all. Maybe cops aren't as dumb as you'd think. So you see, even someone with an IQ like mine can be fooled by first impressions."

"Forget about that moral outrage," said Grijpstra. "Plain old run-of-the-mill jealousy, that's the ticket. Envy. You get that with this sort of woman. *We* can be trapped by first impressions, too."

"But the weapon," said de Gier. "If we only had that, we'd have the lady right along with it. She brought it up herself, did you notice? Overconfident behavior by the suspect, wasn't there a lecture about that not too long ago?"

"Lecture," Grijpstra scoffed. "We don't need lectures. We're *practical* men."

"Listen, have some more to eat." Truus shoved the crockpot towards them. "There's so much left."

"I think the Walther must be here in the apartment somewhere," said de Gier. "Figure it out for yourself: if she'd gotten rid of it on her way from his place back here, she'd be running the risk of somebody accidentally finding it, maybe a good citizen who'd turn it right over to us. Eighty percent of the population of Amsterdam is still law-abiding, why not trust the statistics for once?"

"In the canal, then?" Grijpstra suggested.

De Gier thought it over.

The adjutant closed one eye craftily in conscious imitation of the suspect. "No," he said, "too easy. And anyway, the only water between the Leidsekade and the Leidsedwarsstraat is that tiny little stretch of the Singelgracht there—and she'd have had to cross over the Tivoli terrace to get to it. Too obvious. Plus, she's got to know we'd drag the canals and find it within a couple of hours. No, it's here, all right."

"Women are frugal," said de Gier. "A gun like that would have run her something like two thousand guilders."

"How about just a few more mussels?" Truus complained.

"Remember that time you saved my life?" asked Grijpstra. "That

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suspect in the Red Quarter where we searched for hours and never did turn up his pistol? And he just sat there the whole time, grinning? And then as we were leaving he even held my coat for me, polite as can be? And griped about how chilly it was out, warning me not to catch cold?"

De Gier laughed. "Sure. And it turned out he'd hidden the gun in your jacket pocket when we first came in, and fished it back out again while he was helping you. I chopped his wrist for him. And the gun went off when it hit the floor."

"Shot off the end of my toe," said Grijpstra. "City paid for the shoe, but I walked around with a limp for months."

"I don't understand you two," said Truus. "One measly order of mussels'd cost you four-fifty easy at a takeout counter, and here you've got the chance to eat yourselves sick for free."

The adjutant and the sergeant eyed the crockpot curiously. It was still half full.

"What do you think?" Grijpstra wondered.

"That thing's boiling hot," said de Gier. "If she did, the shells could start going off any second." He grabbed for the pot, then jerked his hand back with a cry of pain.

"Use your handkerchief," frowned Grijpstra.

De Gier turned the pot over. Mussels flooded the table and spilled off its edges onto the wooden floor below. In the middle of the mess steamed a small wet pistol.

"Is it loaded?" cried Grijpstra. "Check the chamber!"

"I'll be damned," de Gier said. "It *is* loaded, and the safety's not even on. Boy, oh, boy, they never learn." He slipped the bullet out of the chamber and pulled the clip free.

"You're under arrest," Grijpstra said to Truus. She tried to stand, but the adjutant pushed her back in her chair. "Just stay right there, okay?"

"You think you can manage with just the two of you?" Truus had a little trouble focusing her furious eyes. "You'll have to drag me to the station house, you know, because I'm not budging on my own."

"I'll call in," said de Gier.

The doorbell rang five minutes later. De Gier buzzed the street door open and two policewomen climbed the narrow stairway. "We walked over," the first one said. "There's noplace to park around here, and the station's practically around the corner. Where's the patient?"

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"Inside. A lady."

"One lady? Couldn't you bring her in yourselves?"

"We didn't dare," said de Gier. "She's sort of forbidding."

"What's the charge?"

"Manslaughter. Maybe murder, we're not sure."

"Well, miss," said the policewoman. "Coming?"

Truus pushed over the table and ran to the kitchen cabinets.

"Grab her!" Grijpstra shouted.

Truus came back swinging a carving knife.

"Well, go on," said de Gier.

"That's a carving knife she's got there," the first policewoman pointed out as her colleague reached for her pistol.

"No, no," said de Gier. "that's not the way to handle a subject. Watch. Truus?"

Truus swung the arm with the knife at him in a wide arc and he blocked it with a quick movement of his own. He turned to the side and wrapped his arm tightly around hers, his hand clamping down on her wrist and twisting it sharply. She screamed. The carving knife dropped. De Gier stepped behind her and pulled her arms back. Handcuffs clicked.

"There," he said to the policewomen. "All yours. You can have her now."

A little later, Grijpstra and de Gier were strolling along the Singelgracht. The dachshund was around again. The adjutant stumbled but de Gier caught him.

"Another female, I'm sure," Grijpstra said.

"I worship them all," de Gier said softly.

"You'll have to give the lady Bakini a little time," said Grijpstra. "She's gone through a lot these last few days, but maybe that's good. You can nip in while she's still down."

"Too good for me," the sergeant said. "I'll be overreaching. I'll pull all my spiritual muscles."

"We were born to develop."

"Nah," de Gier said.

"Do it for me. I would hate to see such a perfect creature fall in wrong hands."

"You're my friend," the sergeant said. "I'll see what I can do for you."

They walked on in silence.

"The adjutant is thinking?"

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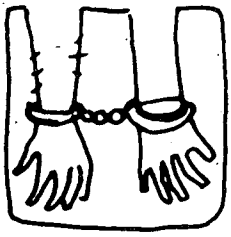
"I'm trying," Grijpstra said, "to think of a place you could take her to. Some fancy restaurant. You'll want to make a good impression."

"Think ahead," the sergeant said, "as long as you come up with someplace where no mussels are served."

(translated by Josh Pachter)



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MAKE MONEY selling to our hot mail order buyers! Thousands of excellent prospects for any item you sell! Send for free valuable report! American Multilist, 3125 19th Street/Suite 138-A, Bakersfield, CA 93301.

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MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

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FREE dealership!! Receive $25.00 orders keep $15.00! Hottest pulling circular around! For complete FREE dealership send long stamped self-addressed envelope: Worldwide #18, Box 15940, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

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"HUNDRED$ WEEKLY!" GUARANTEED PROCESSING $TAMPED ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

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FREE Promotional albums, concert tickets, stereos, etc. Information: Barry Publications, 477 82nd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209.

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POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

20 WORD MINIMUM
Only $59.00 for 20 Words or Less
$2.95 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $2.95 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ .....
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85

(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example. One 20 word ad $59.00 x 3 months = $177.00 x .85 = $150.45)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$59.00**	(2) **$59.00**	(3) **$59.00**	(4) **$59.00**	(5) **$59.00**
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(21) **$61.95**	(22) **$64.90**	(23) **$67.85**	(24) **$70.80**	(25) **$73.75**
(26) **$76.70**	(27) **$79.65**	(28) **$82.60**	(29) **$85.55**	(30) **$88.50**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word: Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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12 *NEW* stories—including

HUGH PENTECOST (starting a new series)
ANNA CLARKE (about Mr. Mundon's memoirs)
WILLIAM BANKIER (about Doctor Workman)
ROBERT TWOHY (about a yellow one-eyed cat)
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JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Our mystery books are the best spine-tinglers anywhere. To introduce you to these gripping tales of suspense and intrigue, we're making this remarkable offer...For only $1, The Detective Book Club will send you these twelve full length novels, each a masterpiece of mystery. Bought separately, these twelve novels would cost you $145.95. For this special trial offer, all twelve are yours, in four handsome, hardcover triple-volumes as shown, for only $1 plus shipping. An incredible value.

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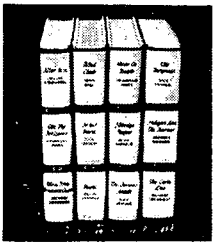

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5-HX
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WALTER J. BLACK, INC.

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

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DETECTIVERSE

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by MARK GRENIER

To his cohorts, a bandit named Bing
Said, "My friends, we have reason to sing,
For the winter has passed,
And the time's come, at last,
For the very first robbin' of spring."

"Q"

RASH DECISION

by MARK GRENIER

"Dietician," said Warden McStout,
"Though I know that the inmates will pout,
When desserts must be planned
I want strawberries banned,
For we mustn't let convicts break out."

"Q"

LOOKING HIGH—AND LO!

by MARK GRENIER

An unlucky voyeur known as Vince,
Up a ladder to have a few squints,
Took a header, you know,
To the concrete below—
And there's been not a peep from him since.

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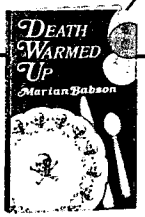
You're invited to the trial.



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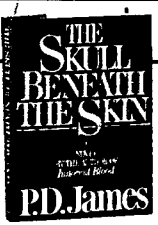

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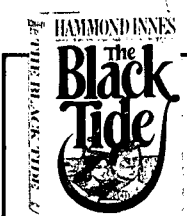

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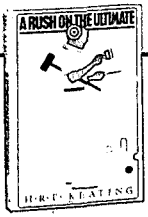

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